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Colonization 2.0: The Evolution of Inequality in a South Texas School District

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Colonization 2.0: The Evolution of Inequality in a South Texas School District

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation first to my family.

The journey was rough at times, and despite the occasional comment to the contrary (!!!) I owe deep gratitude to my wife and life partner Crischelle. You are my rock, and your consistent support empowers me to be courageous and to take great leaps of faith.

Each step of the journey was energized and lightened by a deep well of love I keep for my children, Glory Iris, Roberto Jesus, and "Quito," Michael Christopher. I hope one day to read these pages together, over tea, and to begin the work of inter-generational storytelling that I consider essential to dismantling the colonial project. You can also poke fun at me for being so serious.

We also all love our *Mamommy*, Amy MacDonald, 'ABD,' who gave the most productive years of her life to counseling students in the SUNY system, and for whom countless blank pages eagerly await, aching for her ink. This one's for you.

To my parents: We have all given our best, haven't we?

I dedicate this dissertation *foremost* to my participants/friends, and to "APISD."

You opened your homes to me, and entrusted me with your memories, of joy and pain, and I hope that I honor them here, and can help elevate awareness of the peculiar poison that threatens our community.

To the Américo-Paredes "coffee" culture: I will bring you a copy of this text to sign off on when you feel ready… because we all know what BS, MS, and PhD *really* stand for!

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my doctoral program cohort, and to my committee.

My cohort peers Joanna, Katey, Emily, and Greg P. (and honorary member Greg W.) made sure I kept (most) deadlines. Also, we had our fair share of fine wine to drown the sorrows associated with confronting the harsh reality of educational inequality.

To my committee:

Angela, you have been a great intellectual and moral guide, and this is not so much a conclusion as the beginning of the next phase of our work together. While I was often away for long stretches of time, your spirit kept me company.

Dr. Sharpe, every hour spent in the soft light of your office was downright therapeutic. Finding warm spaces for reflection is critical, and you never shut that door when deadlines loomed!

Dr. Reddick, for some reason I feel refreshed and joyful when you dig deep and thoroughly critique my work; it motivates me to find and to name my own truths.

Dr. Brown, your classroom and curriculum were essential to the progress I made at a critical time, in this work, in my understanding of systems of latent racism, and for the formation of a powerful but ominous question: *What if our educational systems are not "failing" at all, but performing precisely the function for which they were designed?*

Abstract

Colonization 2.0: The Evolution of Inequality in a South Texas School District

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2018

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In "Américo-Paredes" Independent School District (APISD), there is a prevailing sense of unity and pride, represented by a popular phrase: *¡Somos familia!* While some organizations seek to cultivate a sense of 'family' to strengthen organizational cohesion, in APISD this notion is derived from a common set of cultural experiences. Most of the educational community—from teachers, to administrators, to school board members—attended the district as students, at times representing families with multiple generations of participation.

For elder "Hispanics" (Mexican Americans), shared experiences include being subjected to punishment from "Anglo" (White) teachers or principals who *swatted* students' hands (and rears) when they spoke Spanish. This system of abuse, rooted in racism, was symbolically challenged during a student walkout in 1968. The ensuing political conflict accompanied a steady decline of jobs and sustained White flight that gradually reduced the Anglo population of APISD's twin cities. Effective political

organizing increased the power of Hispanic school board members who soon attained an enduring majority. However, decades later, performance outcomes for Hispanic APISD students (99% of students) continue to lag behind more affluent, White peers statewide.

Despite Hispanic board members' historically under-examined role in the academic literature, research affirms their performance has a significant effect on student achievement. For APISD, I conduct a *critical ethnography* (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005) rooted in a series of transcribed life histories of Hispanic members of the school board past and present (1960-2016), and former classmates. I find that while Whites may have left Américo-Paredes in increasing numbers after 1968, *Whiteness* remained.

My research questions include: (a) To what extent do life histories of board members and classmates reflect a narrative of oppressive schooling? (b) What systems of power, leadership, and schooling, both historical and contemporary, affect troubling events that transpire at APISD? (c) Do these factors contribute to schooling as a sustained cycle of socialization?

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Chapter I:

¡Somos Familia!

It is June of 2006. I drive my used Chevy Blazer eastward, toward the morning sun, leaving behind a mid-sized South Texas city, and approach the twin towns of "Américo" and "Paredes"—technically cities by Texas' decree—supporting populations of about 3,500 and 6,000, respectively. The state highway that guides me cuts straight through the heart of the community, following the memory of a once-great Texas railroad. The train tracks used to separate local "Anglos" (Whites) and "Hispanics" (Mexican Americans), including formally through the use of segregation laws establishing an evening curfew. A broad expanse of grass is all that is left today; valuable iron and lumber from abandoned tracks have long since been removed. My drive lasts only about 15 or 20 minutes, but like a conversation with a series of near endings, it drags on and feels much longer. One small town after another comes into view as I slow out of respect for each 30 MPH speed limit sign. I keep thinking: *Are you my town*?

When I arrive, I find myself at a humble crossroads, two state highways intersecting. From this vantage point I can see much of Paredes' commercial activity. A good-sized grocery store, with a bristling, active parking lot. A McDonald's restaurant. A pawn store attached to a laundromat. A few taco stands a stone's throw from two brick and mortar Mexican restaurants. As I would learn, the nearby gas station lunch buffet, serving *pollo en salsa roja* and other favored fare, is a more popular mid-day destination for some local teachers. I wait at the light and watch old clunkers compete in steady morning traffic with pristine, luxury SUVs, as the sounds of *norteño* and *conjunto* drift from open windows.

When I reach "Américo-Paredes" Jr. High, I am ushered into the principal's office for an

interview. He tells me that I am being considered for a math teaching position. I inform the principal that I have not taken a single math class in college, having tested out of calculus in high school. He says, "I think you're qualified," to which I retort, "Well, that makes one of us!" I am offered the job, and as per my guidance from Teach for America, am not allowed to say no. I agree to sign a one-year contract.

At about the same time that I take my first drive into Américo-Paredes, a team of officials from the State of Texas is concluding a thorough investigation—a legislative "performance review"—of the school district. On August 31, 2006, they release a report complementing the district on 8 areas of performance and identifying 80 areas "for improvement" (citation omitted to protect the identity of research participants). The report notes that the school district consists of 99.6 percent Hispanic students, and describes the community of Américo-Paredes as follows:

> [Américo-Paredes Independent School District (APISD)] is located at the intersection of [two state highways], 18 miles northeast of [a mid-sized city] in [South Texas]. The agrarian town of Américo is home to 3,604 Texans. Ninety-five percent of the population is Hispanic, most are under the age of 50, and many are migrant workers. Unemployment rates typically fluctuate between 20 and 32 percent as the growing and harvesting seasons change. . . . The population of Paredes is approximately 5,760. Both Américo and Paredes have little industry, although Paredes has attracted many more businesses. These dynamics converge to present significant challenges for students and educators as they strive to compete in state and federal accountability for student performance. (p. 7)

The state investigators are typically outsiders contracted for this work, and may have little or no connection to the school district or community, both prior to and after conducting the

performance review. Still, in the case of Américo-Paredes, their language is stark and unapologetic. They state definitively that the Américo-Paredes Board of Trustees "continues to overlook its role as a policy-making body and overreach its responsibility by interfering with the daily operations of the district" (state report; citation omitted). Specifically, the report finds that APISD "lacks a plan for managing the district fund balance," which exposes the board to the risk of running out of funds sufficient to cover monthly payroll.

More than a list of troubling symptoms, the report diagnoses the cause of this behavior, asserting in multiple instances that board members "have no knowledge" of the proper procedures needed to fulfill their responsibilities. As an example of this presumed lack of knowledge, the report insists APISD "does not use locally developed or industry standards to determine staffing requirements for schools or departments" and is overstaffed by 77 positions (net, after recommended additions). A list of officially overstaffed positions follows (Table 1). Positions with the greatest excess staff include: Child Nutrition Staff (23), Educational Aides (15), Custodians (15), Clerk/Secretaries (13.5) Security Guards (9), and Bus Drivers (6). These are predominantly manual trades, and none of these roles require a college degree.

Table 1

Overstaffed positions within APISD (State Report, 2006)

POSITION	CHAPTER	RECOMMENDATION	STAFF RECOMMENDED FOR ADDITION (ELIMINATION)	ANNUAL SALARIES AND BENEFITS SAVINGS (COST)	5 YEAR SAVINGS (COST)
Clerk/Secretaries	4	24	(13.5)	$291,681	$1,458,405
Educational Aides	4	24	(15)	$288,660	$1,443,300
Custodians	5	39	(15)	$380,940	$1,904,700
Purchasing Coordinator	7	52	1	($61,614)	($308,070)
Child Nutrition Staff	9	59	(23)	$263,582	$1,317,910
Bus Drivers*	10	64	(6)	$175,350*	$876,750
Technology Strategist	11	71	(1)	$65,834	$329,170
Security Supervisor	12	78	(1)	$44,954	$224,770
DAEP Teacher	12	78	1	$44,954	$224,770
Security Guards	12	79	(9)	$232,253	$1,161,265

Following the publication of the state report in August 2006, APISD experiences a steady decline in their fund balance, including an unprecedented negative balance to start the academic year (AY) 2008-2009 (Figure 1). Board members seek to rectify the situation by approaching a private bank and obtaining a multi-million dollar loan (news article omitted), an unprecedented act that draws a sharp rebuke from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Ultimately, this structural imbalance leads to a Reduction in Force, or RIF in December 2008, which cost the jobs of more than 200 employees, a fate I narrowly avoid (by chance) when I accept a transfer from teaching an elective math course to a core teaching role in social studies that same month.

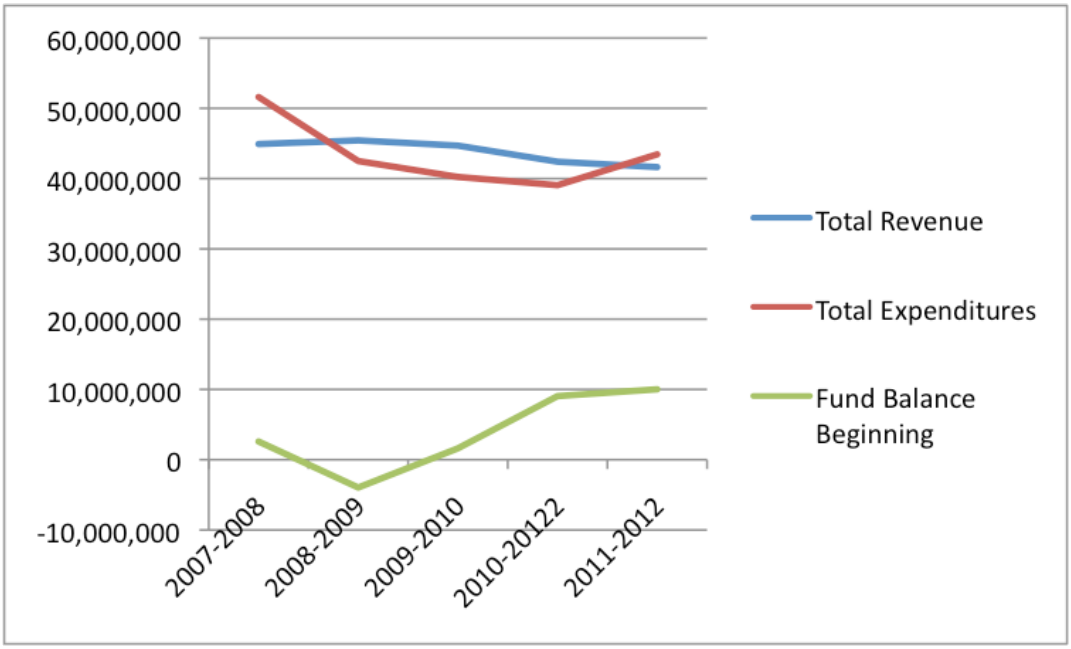

Figure 1. APISD beginning year fund balance, from AY 2007-2012 (TEA, 2015)

In addition to concerning staffing patterns, and other structural factors that affect the district's financial health, the report offers evidence highlighting unequal educational outcomes for APISD students, as compared to Texas overall. While only 1 of 8 district campuses was rated "academically unacceptable" based largely on standardized test performance, overall passing rates for APISD were 16 percent below the state average in AY 2004-2005, measuring 46 against 62 percent, respectively. APISD students scored lower on standardized tests than both the region and the state average in reading and mathematics in grades 3 and 5. This trend was replicated for high school students in all grades. Notably, APISD outperformed some of their state-designated, local demographic peers, even while scores consistently fell below the average for the entire region. While recent research has highlighted the harms and unintended consequences of a state-sanctioned testing regime (Valenzuela, 2005b), test scores do provide some public-facing evidence of inequity within the district, and especially as compared to

affluent Whites.

Despite Hispanic APISD board members' historically under-examined role in the academic literature (Land, 2002), research affirms that school board performance in general has a significant effect on student achievement (Johnson, 2012; Lorentzen, 2013; Saatcioglu, Moore, Sargut, & Bajaj, 2011). To be clear, while there is ample scholarship that addresses school boards, members, and leadership (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Resnick, 1999), this literature largely assumes a *positivist* or *post positivist* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) orientation. Historically, authors of these works, serving as White mouthpieces for the broader academy (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Johnson, 2012; Resnick, 1999) inform a presumably universal, homogenous, and 'race-blind' group of board members of the definitive 'right' actions to take on 'acultural' issues like staffing and financing, which are central to some of APISD's recent struggles.

This literature posits academic 'experts' as bearers of light who can eradicate the 'ignorance' associated with 'uninformed' community leaders. Reading the subtext, one can assume there are two poles between which board members may transition: *enlightened* (White) and *uninformed* (Indigenous/non-White). While the state investigative team which produced the APISD report is content to conclude that a deficit of knowledge accounts for what appear in their view to be clear "failures" by the school board, my research shows there is much more to this story than meets the eye. In Chapter V, which comprises an inclusive discussion of this ethnographic study, I revisit the state performance review to shed light on the subtextual intercultural conflict which is (likely) unconsciously transmitted from the state reviewers to the district board members. As my research reveals, this matter is cultural, and it is influenced by historical forces, including explicit racism and segregation.

In APISD, there is a prevailing sense of unity and pride, represented by a popular phrase: *¡Somos familia!* While some school organizations seek to cultivate a sense of "family" to strengthen organizational cohesion (Weil, 2009, p. 391), in APISD this is derived from a common set of longstanding cultural experiences. Most members of the educational community—from teachers, to administrators, to school board members—attended the district as students, at times representing families with multiple generations of participation. This form of participation is expressed by a common refrain that establishes a *credential* (Collins, 1979; Labaree, 1997): Once a Paredes "Parakeet" (APISD's sports mascot) ... *always a Parakeet!*

For older generations, shared experiences include being subjected to punishment from Anglo teachers and principals, emboldened by Anglo school board members, who swatted students' hands (and rears) when they spoke Spanish. This system of abuse, rooted in racism, was symbolically challenged during a nationally-noted student walkout in 1968. The ensuing political conflict accompanied a steady decline of jobs and sustained White flight that gradually reduced the Anglo population of APISD's twin cities. Effective political organizing increased the power of Hispanic school board members, who soon attained an enduring majority.

Despite the shift in power, and the presumptive elimination of cultural incongruence due to an ethnically homogenous population, performance outcomes for APISD students continue to lag behind more affluent, White peers statewide. In effect, while Whites may have departed APISD in increasing numbers after 1968, *Whiteness* remained. In this regard, the situation in APISD mirrors much of the broader (lower) Rio Grande Valley (RGV), a four-county region of more than 1.3 million residents, covering 4,275 square miles, and stretching more than 130 miles along the Rio Grande River, which constitutes the most-recent border with Mexico.

Research Origins

My story is integral to the origins of this research. As a White male teacher turned researcher, not born of the Rio Grande Valley, who did not attend school in Américo-Paredes, my first introduction to the community was as an outsider/outsider. Each new season and each turn of the year, beginning in 2006 and continuing through the present (2018), represents a gradual process of seeking and earning a negotiated status as an outsider/*insider*. I feel pride in this status, and I accept and embrace it as part of my identity, though it is not fixed or cemented, and each new season I may be judged anew by my actions. This vulnerability respects the power and authority of community insiders as holders of knowledge. Yet consistently I am invited to tables, literal and metaphorical, and given precious access to sacred stories and insiders' insight.

Over 7 years as an APISD teacher, I witnessed firsthand how the trauma and *toxic stress* (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) endemic to communities steeped in poverty often overwhelmed my students. I was awed, as well, by my students' resilience and genuine joy at each successful step in their journey to overcome. Yet I ached to understand how it came to be this way. *Why must Hispanic youth in APISD/RGV suffer as they strive simply to grow, to explore, and to thrive?*

Today my two sons, ages 7 and 9, are Américo-Paredes students; their mother and maternal grandmother are both former APISD graduates who have earned advanced degrees and returned to the community to work as district employees. The lived experiences of my sons, my love for them, and my hope and anxiety for their unfolding future—*skin in the game*—anchors my insider-self. My unique status, including my enduring (White) privilege presents both an opportunity and obligation to advance the voices and interests of members of the community, who have asked me directly and indirectly to conduct this work.

I address my story, inherently entwined with my *positionality* as a researcher, in two additional sections prefacing Chapter II (p. 12) and Chapter III (p. 62). I also attempt throughout the text to apply a steady 'on the spot' self-interrogation of my experience, and my thinking. By this example I hope to demonstrate a commitment to *decolonize* (David, 2013a; Smith, 2012) my research practice. Of course, I cannot expel my Whiteness, and so openly invite critiques from scholars and community members who are non-White, indigenous, and native, and especially those who identify as Hispanic, Mexican America, *Latin@*, *Chican@*, *Tejan@*, and/or *Mestiz@*. My first and final answer to intractable flaws within my (White) dissertation is not to argue over what is or is not the 'right way' (*a la* positivism/post-positivism) to inculcate resistance to White supremacy and fuel resurgence rooted in the culture of our precious and imperiled communities. Rather we must encourage members of the broader APISD, RGV, non-White, and indigenous diaspora to overwhelm the historically-oppressive research academy with their ink, their voices, and the richly textured data, qualitative and quantitative, that define the experience of our youth, and our elders.

For my study, I initially hoped to examine 'failing' student outcomes in the context of a potential social reproduction of inequality through the *cycle of socialization* (Harro, 2000b). Specifically, I contemplated the unique privilege of being able to revisit the hallways and classrooms of APISD Jr. High, where I taught, but in a rare context freed from the teachers' many obligations; able simply to listen, to reflect upon, and to share students' stories. Yet, it seems difficult to account for factors influencing student outcomes without first acknowledging the significant presence of APISD's board of trustees. Once I began to engage board members, our casual conversations became life histories, then *testimonios*, and soon I felt honor bound to

focus my analysis on their experiences, amidst a set of broader historical and sociocultural forces. The students still occupy a central focus for my thinking, however, and their absence from much of the narrative that follows is acknowledged as a key harm of a perpetual inequality.

The historical and sociocultural forces I refer to are represented by *Colonization 2.0*, a syncretism of colonial theories and Critical Race Theory (CRT), among other theoretical strands. The questions I grapple with are essential: *How did we (various faces, races) come to this place? What forces shape both the past and present? What stories do actors central to this experience desire to share? How do these forces (and the stories!) shape our contemporary educational structures, and affect the experiences and outcomes of APISD students?*

In my research, I draw upon my mixed status as an insider/outsider, and my experience within the community—the entirety of my adult life after college—to guide an ongoing *critical ethnography* (Carspecken, 1996; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996). This ethnography is rooted in a series of transcribed life histories, often constituting trauma-filled *testimonios* (Cervantes-Soon, 2012) of predominantly Hispanic members of the APISD school board past and present (1960-2016), and their former classmates. These narratives provide a rich historical and cultural context from which to interpret current events and schooling practices.

The formal research questions that drive my inquiry include:

1. **To what extent do life histories of long-time community members and leaders (e.g. board members) reflect a socio-historical narrative of oppressive schooling?**
2. **What systems of political power, leadership, and schooling, both historical and contemporary, help explain the "troubling" events that transpire at APISD?**
3. **And, to what extent do these factors contribute to a contemporary practice of**

schooling as a cycle of socialization, en route to the reproduction of inequity?

These questions emerged as a byproduct of the research process, as simple conversations with board members transformed into detailed life histories, and moved our discourses from a marginal, contextual space, toward the center—*the very heart*—of my work. As Chapter II explores, cultivating a theoretical paradigm sufficient to reflect these evolving questions led to a holistic, *syncretic* (Norton, 2004, p. 42) framework I refer to as Colonization 2.0.

Chapter II:

Tending the Flame

Colonization 2.0 is a theoretical framework that I consider necessary to connect a contemporary inequality in APISD (2006-2018) to the historical and sociocultural forces that begin with explicit Western colonization *at least* 526 years ago (1492). It is in the simplest form a syncretism that acknowledges the intersection of colonial theories with Critical Race Theory (CRT), as well as studies of intersectionality and hybridity.

In this chapter I acknowledge through a series of "profiles in courage" the scholars who provide the inspiration, direction, and indeed courage necessary to develop a helpful theoretical framework for my research. This framework is key to my ability to understand and interpret the evolving, inter-generational narratives of educational inequality as uncovered through a critical ethnography of APISD. By analyzing transcribed conversations, I reveal distinct periods of inequality, including a present-day *cultural political economy* (Lipman, 2013; Sayer, 2001) of both electoral politics (for board members), and educational access and attainment (for youth), which explains uneven outcomes despite a seemingly homogenous Hispanic population.

Individual theoretical models focused on colonization, critiques of White supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, as well as social reproduction—enabled through a *hidden curriculum* (Jackson, 1990; Snyder, 1971) advancing a pervasive, latent racism (i.e. Critical Race Theory)—offer helpful insights into this work. However, it is only the combination of these strands unto a unifying framework that provides a clear and compelling foundation for my research. I refer to this unified framework as Colonization 2.0, which also constitutes a process.

By decentralizing state-sanctioned acts of oppression, decoupling the agents of aggression from the predominantly White male beneficiaries, and placing accountability in the hands (or in the heads) of the oppressed, Colonization 2.0 succeeds in perpetuating harmful social structures without triggering alarms associated with an explicit, conscious model of colonization reminiscent of past eras. Eroding the power and proportion of local Whites, for example, does not inherently erode the power and prevalence of *Whiteness*. "You have only yourself to blame," may as well be the mantra of this form of colonization.

In this chapter I survey relevant literature to advance secondary questions essential to locating my research inquiry within a suitable theoretical framework: *How has my fraternity with courageous scholars and their key works led me to a specific theoretical framework? To what extent can this framework—Colonization 2.0—account for the transition from an historical to a contemporary process of socialization of schooling, especially in APISD and South Texas' Rio Grande Valley? How does Colonization 2.0 differ from existing theories, past and present?*

This chapter addresses these questions in three parts. The first part interrogates the origins of the term "profiles in courage" and offers brief profiles of my most influential scholars as *counter-stories* (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), or counter-narratives crucial to the development of my framework and research agenda. The second part describes distinct features of the theoretical model, and explains how Colonization 2.0 differs from alternate models, including *neo-colonialism* (Nkrumah, 1965). The third part presents a concrete example, that of the transformation of *maíz* the "sacred Mother" into McDonald's the public health epidemic, which illuminates how Colonization 2.0 continues to advance a White supremacist *axiology* (values), *ontology* (worldview), *epistemology* (way of knowing), and *methodology* (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson,

2008). Taken together, these sections identify an ever-scaling, globalized monoculture of Whiteness, consistent with hooks' (2004) notion of *imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy* (also referred to throughout as White supremacy/ist), which thrives at the expense of indigenous cultures, and results in the erosion of all biodiversity, inclusive of cultural diversity.

Positionality as *AOEM*, An Abbreviated Discussion

The theoretical paradigm presented in this chapter is shaped in part by my positionality, which subsequently shapes my axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology (*AOEM*). My personal story is especially important to this research study because I am in a unique role as an insider/outsider. I am a White, heteroflexible, male, from a (generally) middle class family, who arrived in Américo-Paredes with a college degree, and fully-employed. I was born in Silver Springs, Maryland, but moved numerous times across and between five states before graduating from high school in Marietta, Georgia. I am often asked if my father was in the military (gender and other implications aplenty), but in fact a combination of family dysfunction and economic opportunity drove the moves, most of which were initiated by my step-father after the dissolution of my Mom's first marriage. After high school, I spent four years in St. Paul, Minnesota, at Macalester College. My educational journey was driven by an internal/external motivation to 'achieve' at the greatest level, with outsized expectations. A popular family home-video (captured on VHS) shows me standing on a small rise on a Jacksonville, Florida beach at age 6 spouting off in screeching, fast-paced sentences how "I am the smartest person in the world" and extolling my future accomplishments. This self-praise, self-glorification, and self-delusion was reinforced by a testing and tracking system that labeled me "gifted and talented," and subsequently led to participation in college courses for "gifted students" beginning in 7th grade.

By 18, I genuinely thought I would write a great American novel, earn a Nobel prize for physics, and might (begrudgingly) allow myself to become President, "but only en route to assembling a new, more effective league of nations," I thought … which I doubtless would head.

While it might seem audacious for me to hold Whiteness accountable for my adolescent megalomania, in several conversations with close White male friends from comparable contexts, we have co-confessed to experiencing similar self-perceptions/delusions. The most resonant and fascinating pop-culture evidence of this phenomenon is "Lucy," the (purportedly) prototypical example of a "Generation Y Yuppy" (Urban, 2013). In his Huffington Post article, which notably does not address race, and was shared at least 280,000 times via social media, Urban describes Lucy as a "Gen Y Protagonist & Special Yuppie" (GYPSY) who is "wildly ambitious." Specifically, Lucy is represented visually, with a cartoon thought bubble that literally says "I suppose I could be President … but is politics really the truest calling of my heart? No … no that would be settling." When I read this, I thought, "That's me! I'm Lucy!"

Essential to the maintenance of these grandiose perceptions/delusions is an assumption (a) that the external validation (awards) and 'achievement' we seek are inherently meritorious, and (b) that these rewards do not predominantly accrue to Whites, but to all people equally. An aversion to hard facts is essential to the preservation of this perception/delusion. These informal childhood reflections, shared in common among close White male friends and "Lucy," and the delusions and assumptions they uncloak, may serve as the launching point for future inquiries.

My childhood axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology (*AOEM*) underwent significant self-interrogation as an APISD teacher, when my perceptions of self were met with the gnawing suspicion that the game was rigged disproportionately against my APISD students.

"Something is amiss," I found myself writing in a journal, and then reflecting on often, almost as a mantra. I explore the individual *AOEM* elements as a component of my researcher positionality in greater detail in Chapter III (methodology). My purpose in this section is simply to clarify that I inherently negotiate between an *AOEM* inherited from my (White, privileged) childhood, and an alternative *AOEM* I strive to adopt and apply in my role as researcher.

A contradictory pattern of educational research that is deeply concerning as an emerging scholar is the unconscious adoption of a positivist or post positivist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) orientation, which inherently rejects 'selection' of a preferred framework as a valid choice. Positivism and post positivism are also the research paradigms that silently govern the bulk of scholarship on board members and board leadership in education. The only choice for positivists and post positivists alike is whether to pursue truth, or not, and how effectively you execute the search. Classically, the best approach is one that 'removes' the researcher from the research. This pattern is rampant in quantitative studies that resist examining researchers' *AOEM*, and accordingly Guba & Lincoln (1994) opt to qualify their paper as pertaining specifically to qualitative research. However, this troubling pattern discourages researchers in quantitative as well as qualitative studies from pursuing deep, critical interrogations of their positionality, as incorporated into their *AOEM*. In practice, this pattern preserves and proliferates White supremacy at the expense of *indigenous research paradigms* (Chilisa, 2012).

Ironically, researchers in search of an objective, universal truth close off doors of inquiry and decline to turn the scalpel of scrutiny unto their selves, except to habitually disinfect all evidence of their humanity with the broad label of "researcher bias" (Chilisa, 2012). This calls to mind the fictional musings of Pirsig (1981), who wonders "why it took us so long to catch on.

We saw it and yet we didn't see it. Or rather we were trained not to see it. Conned, perhaps . . . The truth knocks on the door and you say, "Go away, I'm looking for the truth," and so it goes away. Puzzling" (p. 6). The truth is, (almost?) no researcher stumbles upon their topic blindly, nor do they choose topics and tools of inquiry from random slips of paper folded into hats. Likewise, researchers cannot disconnect the eyes that observe, and the mind that reasons from their childhood, their sociocultural environment, and their personal history of schooling.

My frequent use of the *AOEM* frame (and an intentionally intrusive abbreviation) for exploring a research paradigm is meant to set a standard for myself, but also to imply still more puzzling questions: *Why, even in critical research, do scholars so infrequently identify their positionality to this degree of specificity? To what extent does this aversion reinforce a default White supremacist AOEM?* Reflecting on these questions is part of a habit of self-interrogation that reinforces my commitment to decolonize (David, 2013a; Smith, 2012) my research practice.

Accordingly, the scholars I profile in this chapter do not form 'the' definitive vanguard overseeing a discrete and bounded body of knowledge, but comprise a personal community consistent with my own negotiated *AOEM*. It is, in fact, by their example that I learned to interrogate, decolonize, and explicate my axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology. To be clear, for me 'the literature' is neither dead nor discrete. Each strand is part of a woven tapestry, threads that preserve actual aspiration, precious human voices. It is not a sea of parched pages I seek to aggregate in the hundreds of volumes overflowing my office nook at home, but the resurrection *in abstentia* of a community, which transcends time across many generations, and shares a common struggle. As Wilson (2008) explains "knowledge cannot be owned or discovered but is merely a set of relationships that may be given a visible form" (p. 127).

In this chapter, and in my broader work, I seek not to plant a flag and to lay claim to uncharted territory found 'in the gaps' of the literature. Rather, I offer my scholarship as modest tribute to a powerful chorus I aspire to join. I hope to breathe life into the flame we keep, to carry a torch lit from that flame, and to sing in my own style, and for my own community, a familiar refrain of resistance. The song and the flame to which I refer are the deepest forms of resistance to a White *master narrative* ("Quito", 2014; Valenzuela, 2005a) that drives a millennia long colonization experiment. It is at the epistemological borderlands of metaphor, where rationality risks being stained as sentimental, or emotional, that I expect to dwell. This is where resistance thrives. I must humanize my literature review, or else the roots of this *árbol*, my work, will be fused in the metaphorical concrete of the White master narrative.

In the preceding passage I apply at least four metaphors: that of the tapestry, the chorus, the flame, and the *árbol*. In actuality these metaphors all strive—individually imperfect but collectively capable—to represent a resistance movement. By contrast, the original *Profiles in Courage* (Kennedy, 2003) reinforces an imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy, and promotes a corresponding White supremacist *AOEM*. I originally intended to reference John F. Kennedy's work only in passing, to acknowledge briefly the origin of the phrase "profiles in courage" and to simply point out how his profiles were limited to pre-Civil Rights U.S. Senators (all White men).

I felt compelled, however, in the absence of extant critical scholarship to more fully interrogate the myths that emerged around the man from *Camelot* (White, 1963)—to set the record straight—en route to advancing the profiles of courageous scholars as counter-narratives. If this detour damages the quality and focus of my dissertation, it speaks only to my growing

responsibility to interrogate and decolonize the false idols of White supremacy, even when it is not particularly convenient.

Profiles in Courage

The phrase "profiles in courage" is lifted, or perhaps reclaimed from John F. Kennedy's (2003) Pulitzer Prize-winning text of the same name. Written while recovering from surgery as a sitting U.S. Senator in 1954-55 (Kennedy, 2003, p. xxi), Kennedy locates courage solely within the anecdotes of his political peers—Senators past and (then) present—who are all White men. Robert F. Kennedy reinforces this notion in a later-edition foreword written the month after President Kennedy's assassination, quoting a Lord Tweedsmuir, "one of the President's favorite authors" (p. xvii) who says of public life "to young *men* it is the worthiest ambition" (p. xviii) (emphasis added). The ubiquity of this text, a familiar part of my own, largely uninterrogated, White, male consciousness by high school, inherently reifies the White patriarchal aspect of hook's (2004) hegemonic model. Indeed, the 2003 edition of *Profiles* that I obtained from a local RGV library was illuminating.

An introduction by Kennedy's daughter Caroline asserts "our collective definition of courage has expanded" (p. xii) since her father's book was written. This reads as an implicit call for increased diversity in the stories of courage we promote, and Caroline follows this statement by citing the examples of Rep. Hilda Solis, a Latina, and Rep. John Lewis, an African American. I wonder though, who is included in "our" collective? Did Latina/o and African American citizens need an expanded definition of courage? Additionally, despite Caroline's encouraging rhetoric, she insists Kennedy's exclusively male-oriented text tells the stories of courage for "men and women" (p. x) both.

In her own text, *Profiles in Courage for Our Time*, Caroline Kennedy (2002) is afforded a greater opportunity to break free from an epistemology that preferences White, male narratives (and truths) above all others. However, among the 16 "courageous" individuals profiled by Caroline Kennedy, there are only five who deviate from the White, male pattern. To account for the presence of these five, Caroline Kennedy describes how "new groups of Americans—women, African Americans, Latinos—have entered the political system, embracing a different kind of courage: the courage to compromise" (p. 6). Of course women, and communities of racial and ethnic minorities are not "new" to our political system; rather they have in this century overcome some of the great many hurdles designed predominantly by White men to prevent their full participation and self-empowerment. As for "compromise", which is explicitly positioned in the text in contrast to a White man's "commitment" to *his* convictions, it seems a strange qualifier for Caroline Kennedy to associate with the courage of non-Whites and women. In a sad way, it echoes Thucydides (1996), who declares "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (p. 352). Caroline Kennedy (2002) closes her introduction by invoking the masculine-infused words of her father, who wrote in his original text (emphasis added):

> In whatever arena of life one may meet the challenge of courage, whatever may be the sacrifices *he* faces if *he* follows *his* conscience—the loss of *his* friends, *his* fortune, *his* contentment, even the esteem of *his* fellow men—each *man* must decide for *himself* the course *he* will follow. The stories of past courage can define that ingredient—they can teach, they can offer hope, they can provide inspiration. But they cannot supply courage itself. For this, each *man* must look into *his* own soul. (p. 7)

Aside from the inclusion of some non-White and female chapter authors, Caroline Kennedy's text is little more than a compendium acknowledging the early recipients of the Profiles in Courage Award, established by the Kennedy Foundation. The first of these recipients, chosen from 5,000 nominees, went to Carl Elliott, who is given credit for championing the 1958 National Defense Education Act, "which helped to make college education accessible to all Americans without regard to their race or economic status" (Kennedy Library Foundation, 1990). Sounds good. However, Elliott, a White congressman from Alabama, claims to care most about "seeing that folks got what they deserved, good or bad" (Kennedy, 2002, p. 13) and signed the "Southern Manifesto" which opposed *Brown v. Board* on the grounds that it destroyed previously "amicable relations between the white and Negro races" (Aucoin, 1996). Elliott consistently voted "the Southern way" on issues of civil rights, and was "not eager to commit political suicide" (Kennedy, 2002, p. 22) choosing instead to stand in support of the explicitly racist Alabama Governor George Wallace. If Elliot's example is meant to typify a more modern, "expanded" definition of political courage, then we ought to be deeply concerned. It is possible his selection as the inaugural recipient of the Profiles in Courage award had more to do with his prior service in Congress as a "Southerner willing to go against other Southerners who were holding up John F. Kennedy's bills" (Haygood, 1989).

Seeking some common ground, I can agree with John F. Kennedy (2003) that courage is among the "most admirable" (p. 1) of virtues, and I also embrace Hemingway's poetic definition of courage as "grace under pressure" (p. 1). Furthermore, there is value in Kennedy exposing the pressure within the U.S. Senate to conform to the status quo, an anxiety "to abide by the clubhouse rules and patterns, not to pursue a unique and independent course, which would

embarrass or irritate the other members" (p. 4). This resonates with Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (Bourdieu & Nice, 1977). Unfortunately, it is a habitus that Kennedy cannot seem to escape for long, invoking the words of a Senator who disparages the concept of a political party by comparing it to "an Indian tribe held together by blood and prejudice" (p. 13). Also, Kennedy credits his brand of courage with keeping alive a "spirit of individualism" (and dissent, notably), which "gave birth to this nation" (p. 17), and subsequently "enriched the heritage of every citizen in every part of the land" (p. 19). This language emboldens a White supremacist paradigm rooted in a 'common sense' and 'American' axiology of individualism that thrives at the expense of community and diversity, an ontology that presumes Native Americans' (and non-Whites') inferiority, and an epistemology that prioritizes stories written by, for, and about White men.

Efforts by Caroline Kennedy to revise this definition fall short of the mark, though others have written alternative takes on Kennedy's *Profiles* that prominently feature African American narratives (Abdul-Jabbar & Steinberg, 1996), and stories from women spread throughout India (Sathe & Kulkarni, 1999). Generally, however, there is a surprising lack of critical scholarship addressing the iconic text.

In a rare exception from 1957, in an interview with Mike Wallace, controversial journalist Drew Pearson created a stir when he said that Kennedy "is the only man in history that I know who won a Pulitzer Prize on a book which was ghost-written for him" (Wallace, 1957). Pressure applied from the Kennedy family led to a televised retraction the following week (Sorensen, 2008, p. 150), yet various sources maintain that John F. Kennedy's long-time staffer Ted Sorensen played a greater role than mere "research associate" (Kennedy, 2003, p. xxii). In *Profiles*, Kennedy admitted he owed "the greatest debt" to Sorensen, whom he described as

providing “invaluable assistance in the assembly and preparation of the material upon which this book is based” (p. xxii). Later Sorensen (2008) would clarify that he wrote the “first draft of most chapters [and] … helped choose the words in many of its sentences” (pp. 146-151) and was duly rewarded with a generous sum as compensation, which as of 1961 amounted to more than half of the “total net earnings” from the book (p. 148).

Adding to the intrigue, Kennedy’s father Joseph lobbied a close friend on the Pulitzer board to ensure that a book “not even on the screening committee’s list of nominees received the 1957 Pulitzer Prize for biography” (Leamer, 2001, p. 352). Accusations of self-promotion dogged Kennedy during his presidential campaign, and opponents often quipped he should “show less profile and more courage” (Sorensen, 2008, p. 152). It seems perhaps, “in jest, there is truth,” (Shakespeare, & Leggatt, 1991).

While I did not set out to stain the myth of Kennedy’s legacy, it seems dismantling the false idols of a privileged, White upbringing is a necessary step in the process of decolonizing my own *AOEM*. However, this process is also helpful in shedding light on the abundance of uninterrogated idols entrenched within the imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy. While my interrogation might be described as critical commentary, the subject of inquiry (JFK) is still rooted in Whiteness, and so I introduce the following academic profiles in courage, which operate as counter-stories, rejecting Whiteness as the center of all discourse. Indeed, some of these narratives transcend a dichotomy of White/non-White and embrace a notion of indigenous discourses, which can be located entirely within an indigenous paradigm, inclusive of indigenous axiologies, ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies (Wilson, 2008).

Jeff Duncan-Andrade. In January of 2013, I was preparing a statement of intent for an application to join my doctoral program in education. Previously, in the fall of 2012 I took the LSAT and applied to two Texas-based law schools. The Ph.D. pathway was a means of hedging my bets, a response to numerous, unsolicited page-long 'comments'—actually dire warnings—from acquaintances on social media platforms who had become disillusioned with their law careers. My then girlfriend and now spouse shared a journal article by Duncan-Andrade (2009), who introduced me to the realm of formal educational scholarship. This article, and the broader messages carried within, worked their way into my Ph.D. application, realigned my thinking and teaching, and renewed a habit of deep reading and critical reflection which continues to inspire this research.

Somewhere in the tangle of professional development sessions I endured/negotiated over seven years as a middle school educator there must have been a dash of academic literature. But after many months, now years of sustained reflection, nothing comes to mind. As a teacher, I leaned heavily on teacher 'exemplars' like Esquith (2003, 2007), who preached a sub-textual doctrine of rugged individualism, of grit and perseverance for teachers and students alike. Esquith's main obstacle was "bureaucracy", which I now conceptualize as a race-blind euphemism for imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Within the social studies context, I drew what is now all too common inspiration from Zinn (2005), and Loewen (1996), yet their critical counter narratives fell short of acknowledging a pervasive, latent system of White advantage.

I could read accounts of history by Zinn and Loewen and still believe that the academic fraud which had been perpetuated by Anglo-America could be remedied with a 'better'

accounting of the facts, supported by 'richer' primary sources, producing a tapestry of perspectives woven into a single (more) 'truthful' representation of events occurring within a particular time and place. Curiously, before Duncan-Andrade, my thinking and practice as a teacher were most dramatically impacted by Wood (2008), who I now realize (upon re-reading) tragically complains often of a "suffocating" emphasis in academic circles on race, class, and gender issues, a trend he holds largely responsible for many contemporary "multicultural perversions of our historical understanding" (p. 273).

In a compilation of book reviews, Wood criticizes scholars who would abandon the American Dream, "a liberal ideology of individualistic and private-property-loving capitalism" (p. 269) which he reassuringly asserts, "recent Asian and Hispanic immigrants seem to have accepted and endorsed" (p. 275). This message reifies the notion of 'good' vs. 'bad' immigrants who often respond to pressure to assimilate, even at the cost of their own cultural or indigenous values (i.e. *AEOM*). This represents a form of what Anzaldúa calls *linguistic terrorism* (p. 80, 1999). Wood's tone of mildly muffled disdain for critical scholars does little, however, to stifle the power of the postmodern and multicultural texts he introduces. These glimpses of works by scholars like Gary Nash (2005) added depth and texture to my historical thinking, and triggered a period of deep reflection—even dreaming—which helped set me on a journey of discovery, a "path without destination" (Kumar, 1999). Duncan-Andrade (2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2009, Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2007) was the first courageous guide I met on this long sojourn.

Duncan-Andrade's (2009) paper is notable for stepping past platitudes of hope, calling out "hokey hope, mythical hope, and hope deferred" (p. 181) and talking back to the "hyperbole that suggests if urban youth just work hard, pay attention, and play by the rules, then they will go

to college and live out the [American dream]" (p. 182). For Duncan-Andrade, the rhetoric of the *liberal ideology* Wood (2008) advances, actually masks a dominant ideology that emphasizes the "preservation of privileged bodies at the expense of the policing, disposal, and dispossession of marginalized 'others' " (p. 190).

For me, Duncan-Andrade ascribes a name and vivid voice to an internal monologue, a narrator within that long helped me game social settings and fed me proprietary insights into the peculiar behavior of individuals and institutions, but heretofore was concealed within a *psychic prison* of sorts (Morgan, 1997). This sounds dramatic, but in fact we often filter the stark language of internal analysis through a social sieve that mutes our tone, presumably to avoid offense, alienation, or embarrassment, but also to preserve our status within the habitus of our lives. We play 'the game' quietly, so as not to give away our key strategy. Duncan-Andrade's courage enabled me to label that filter, to call out the ideology it represents, and to rediscover and seek to understand an 'intuitive', arguably decolonized voice, which appears 'unfiltered' by comparison. To choose to refuse to play the game for self-gain alone.

Now looking back, I see there was a hint of this coming transformation in my work as a mentor for new teachers. I urged them often to "make the implicit, explicit." If, for example, they were expressing frustration with students' performance on a standardized test, I would ask that they consider the real source of that frustration, like compounding pressure from administrators to 'perform,' or else face dramatic consequences, both real and imagined. Talking earnestly with students about the structural forces which pressure all of us to compete, compare, and define our value and self-worth through this reductive testing process (Valenzuela, 2005b), transforms a moment of unconscious social reproduction into an honest invitation to grapple with

(and possibly to resist?) the forces at play. Of course, at the time I could neither have envisioned nor executed the previous sentence. The double-edged sword of transformation, however, leaves me curious whether I will emerge from this educative process incomprehensible to my former colleagues, whose language has not been pressed into the service of erudition by the ivory tower.

Reading Duncan-Andrade (2009) also initiated a discovery process fueled by exponential growth; the scholars he cites enticed me then and now to dig ever deeper. He is not alone, and I ache to know each and every member of his—now *our*—community, including, as then cited and since read, often for peer-reviewed work: Delpit (1995), Friere (1997), Ladson-Billings (1994), Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), and Valenzuela (1999).

In a recent media interview, Duncan-Andrade describes himself as "an English teacher, a community member, a father, a researcher, a writer, a brown man raised in [a] hip hop generation" (Wilson, 2015). To draw upon one specific strand of this identity, Duncan-Andrade is a teacher who writes for teachers. In addition to his duties as a professor of Raza studies and Educational Administration at San Francisco State University, Duncan-Andrade teaches high school English in East Oakland. Duncan-Andrade (2007) finds "the perspective of classroom teachers is sorely absent from the educational research community . . . [yet] it is possible and important to have the voice of practitioners be heard in discussions about effective teaching" (pp. 617-618). Effective teaching for Duncan-Andrade is rooted in a *social justice pedagogy* (2007), or "a set of teaching practices that aim to create equitable social and academic outcomes for students in urban schools" (p. 618) which resonates with my goals for APISD, as a former teacher and current researcher.

Curiously, a more recent addition to my research agenda resonates with emerging work by Duncan-Andrade, both of us now participants in the movement to support *community schools* (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Green & Gooden, 2014). My involvement emerged from work I performed in Austin, Texas, supporting a series of community schools formed in a district and non-profit partnership, and backed by a federal grant. Duncan-Andrade embraces the community school concept as a means of alleviating the toxic stress (2009, p. 185) associated with "housing, employment and food insecurity" (Wilson, 2015) among other consequences of poverty, and in 2015 launched the Roses in Concrete Community School in Oakland, California. The name of the school relates to the title and recurring metaphor from Duncan-Andrade's 2009 paper, which invokes rapper and poet Tupac Shakur, who "referred to young people who emerge in defiance of socially toxic environments as the 'roses that grow from concrete' " (p. 186).

Sadly, these profiles in courage will too often fail to faithfully represent the person behind the papers. While I won't say definitively it does not exist, a brief but rigorous search finds no compelling biographies of Jeff Duncan-Andrade. The same is true of the other scholars I address, including the much-venerated Gloria Ladson-Billings. This legitimately qualifies Duncan-Andrade, Ladson-Billings, and others to follow as unsung (or unwritten?) heroes. Yet I will sing their songs, and seek to join the choir, offering up as testimony my commitment to positively transform my community through the research they provoke. Perhaps in future work I may conduct oral histories with these courageous heroes, and extend to their voice the same courtesy I attempt to offer the Hispanic board members and contemporary classmates of APISD.

Gloria Ladson-Billings. While Duncan-Andrade introduced me to formal educational research during a period of transition from teaching to doctoral research, Ladson-Billings

provided the introduction to a theoretical framework sufficient to grapple with overwhelming data demonstrating pervasive racial segregation in residential neighborhoods and schools, enabled through latent racism. From the fall of 2013 on, Critical Race Theory (CRT) would anchor my research. Critical Race Theory, which originates from work in critical legal studies (Bell, 1980; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993), also provides a useful foundation for the concept of *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* (CRP), which Ladson-Billings champions (Ladson-Billings, 1992). As I explain in my first peer-reviewed paper featuring independent research (Barnes, Germain, & Valenzuela, 2016), which draws liberally and gratefully from Ladson-Billings' body of work:

> We encourage . . . "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 110), which is explicitly anti-assimilationist. Specifically, CRP operates in opposition to a status quo system whose "major function is to transmit dominant culture beliefs, values, myths and ideologies and to induct students into the role that society has determined for them with an unquestioning, uncritical view" (p. 110). In this way, CRP and CRT operate in parallel to resist the assimilation of communities of color into a system of schooling which renders as normative a vast unconscious racism. It is probably not a coincidence then, that in 1995, in collaboration with William Tate (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), Ladson-Billings released two seminal articles on CRT and CRP (1995), respectively. (p. 8)

Additionally, Ladson-Billings affected my positionality, shifting my perspective and providing me theoretical guidance, as I describe in the same paper:

> Our [TFA] insider author is . . . a white male, whose income and level of education place him squarely in a position of advantage via privilege. . . . Despite having a general awareness of racial inequity in America, only upon confronting a substantial body of data (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004; Orfield, 2002) situated in the context of an explanatory CRT framework (Ladson-Billings, 1998), did he realize the true reach and disruptive force of a latent, racially biased system of advantage. (p. 12)

This profound influence extends to the creation of my doctoral research agenda, because here Ladson-Billings' courage is most inspiring, as embedded in her own post-doctoral journey (Barnes, et al., 2016):

> In 1989, . . . Ladson-Billings embarked on a very different, scholarly mission within education. Ladson-Billings (1994) was deeply concerned with America's schools, specifically the "downward spiral" (p. xv) faced by African Americans. . . .
>
> Ladson-Billings assumed ownership over her epistemology, forswore objectivity, and blended a way of knowing, through memory and lived experience, with an ethnographic study that captured a distinct model of excellent teaching. Excellence in Ladson-Billings' case was determined not through the measure of teachers' GPA or SAT scores, but by surveying parents, students, and principals to discover which teachers most positively influenced an African American community. (p. 19)

What is notable is that Ladson-Billings was undertaking risks by deviating from a White supremacist *AOEM* long before it was clear she would attain external validation through her career, though the prominent Spencer Foundation supported her early work. The message to me is to trust my intuition, even while I embrace peer-critiques and apply filters of self-interrogation

to transform a raw stream of thought (rough drafts) into a chiseled mirror for communal reflection (final publications).

Charles Lawrence. While a review of relevant literature would ideally begin with reading early, canonical works, followed by secondary and tertiary texts—progressing as one would scale a tree, by stepping from the roots, to the trunk, then ascending branches and approaching the canopy—in reality the process of discovery is asymmetric and *memetic* (Dawkins, 1976). For Critical Race Theory, my trajectory began first with Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) and Scheurich & Young (1997). I submitted a paper applying this framework (Barnes, Valenzuela, & Germain, 2016) and was strongly advised by a peer-reviewer to travel from the "secondary and tertiary" texts (trunk and branches) back to the roots of the theory. Though initially flustered at the prospect of having to re-educate myself, this process led me to Charles Lawrence (1987), whose writing draws forth the words of Wilde's (2013) Dorian Gray, who insists we have "ancestors in literature, as well as in one's own race, nearer perhaps in type and temperament, many of them, and certainly with an influence of which one was more absolutely conscious" (p. 196). On one hand a tree and roots metaphor in literature risks reinforcing a linear notion of idea invention and ownership, which I reject in favor of a gradual and asynchronous cultural evolution of ideas as *memes* (Dawkins, 1976). On the other hand, pressure to read Lawrence (1987) and other early CRT scholars (Bell, 1980; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993) resulted in the formation of a powerful bond. This is witnessed in the final published paper (Barnes, et. al, 2016), which features eight references to Lawrence's work and 11 lines of quoted text. The most moving of these excerpts is from Lawrence (1987):

> One's inability to know racial discrimination when one sees it results from a failure to recognize that racism is both a crime and a disease. This failure is compounded by a reluctance to admit that the illness of racism infects almost everyone. Acknowledging and understanding the malignancy are prerequisites to the discovery of an appropriate cure. But the diagnosis is difficult, because our own contamination with the very illness for which a cure is sought impairs our comprehension of the disorder. (p. 321)

Lawrence's words illuminate with ease the sinister nature of unconscious racism, and demonstrate the potent harm that exceeds even explicit acts by racist individuals. Yet, he also validates the power and appreciation for metaphor as a tool for researchers. Quite literally, he spoke the words of my conscience, which I had been sharing with others orally—this parable of racism as a health epidemic (a "cancer" as I described it)—and reinforced the notion that "knowledge cannot be owned or discovered" (Wilson, 2008, p. 127). Lawrence's synchronous words and images imported from decades' past did not disrupt a desire to 'invent' novel themes, nor discourage me from continuing down a 'worn path' but instead emboldened me to dig deeper in the literature, always, for I may find there a set of supporting relationships that enrich my research journey.

The power of our *fraternity* (apologies for masculine framing) lies not in contemplating what I owe to Lawrence, but rather appreciating the resonance and synchronicity of someone who echoed and advanced my current thinking, all the while writing from a vantage point lodged in the past. It leaves me wondering: *What has taken me so long to find these scholars? Where have I been all this time?* The short answer: rooted in a paradigm of White supremacy, which

ironically caused me substantial harm. In reading and writing about the next courageous scholar, I confronted these harms openly for the first time.

E. J. R. David. My first academic publication for a journal was a book review of David's (2013a) text *Brown Skin, White Minds*. I selected this text from a long list of proposed titles because it dealt with the concept of *colonial mentality* (2013a) in the context of Filipino/a-American identity, a community that has endured multiple cycles of colonization. Specifically, Filipino/a-Americans were colonized first by the Spanish, then by America, and as David and I discuss in the book review, today they often confront an enduring colonial mentality or *internalized oppression* (David, 2013b), which resonates strongly with my model of Colonization 2.0.

As additional context and motivation for this book review, my then partner and now spouse is a Filipina-American. Specifically she is *Ilocano/a* (when asked about the o/a form, she said she identified with "both") and we are enjoying the process of rearing our biracial daughter, Glory Iris, alongside my/our biracial sons from my ex-spouse (who identifies as "Mexican") Roberto Jesus, and Michael Christopher "Quito." The Ilocano/a are a regional and tribal group with a distinct dialect (also *Ilocano*) that was my wife's home language. *Tagalog*, the Filipino national language, serves more as a *lingua franca* necessary for use in schools, while traveling the breadth of the country, and for conducting state business. As a side note, my increasingly complex family tree (or grove perhaps?) in some ways drew me closer to members of the APISD and RGV community; in coming to accept divorce I both rejected White notions of a 'normal' nuclear family, as well I took for granted that my work, life, and fate was now inextricably tied to the RGV, and APISD where my sons currently attend elementary classes. That these ties are

literally beyond my control (my ex-spouse has no evident plan or desire to decamp) itself eases the distance between my life trajectory, rooted in outsider/privileged contexts, and Hispanic families within APISD and the RGV, who are permanently rooted in the South Texas soil.

The challenge that confronted me most while contemplating David's (2013a) work, was the pressure—after reviewing reviews of other books to get a sense for what they look like—to deconstruct, dismantle, and generally skewer (*publically!*) without mercy some or another element of the text. While at the time I had not read Wilson (2008), nor realized the value of an explicit *AOEM*, now I would say that many of the book reviews adopted an axiology of objective dispassion, embracing the adage that emotion has no place in research, and inherently opposing Wilson's indigenous axiology of *relationality* (2008). Yet from my intuition, or perhaps from an emerging scholar's nascent critical consciousness, arose an impulse to resist this trend, and indeed David's text encouraged my resistance. As I describe in the review (Barnes, 2014):

> In keeping with the spirit of *Kapwa* [a Filipino indigenous axiology], David [2013a] acknowledges that the work of both the writer and reader is not resolved by arriving at the final page of his text, nor is their journey a separate one. Both "fellow beings," or *Kapwa-Tao* (p. 109) are called upon to "spark the decolonization journeys of individuals, communities, and systems by raising awareness about the existence and effects of colonial mentality" (p. 238-239).

For me, this decolonization journey led to a consideration of how a White master narrative may harm even individuals situated in sites of privilege. As I discuss (Barnes, 2014):

> I perceive that I may be subject to the harms of an epistemological bias against indigenous values. I believe that the lasting impacts of colonialism and the perennial

> renewal of a Manichean society create harms that encourage self-hate even among privileged populations (i.e. White males). (p. 14)
>
> As an example, which explores my positionality:
>
> I don't actually want to be an education researcher in Austin, not at least more than I want to spend every day with my two sons [and now daughter] of biracial heritage in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. I don't want to chase systemic change, not at least more than I want to spend every day in a purposeful classroom in *El Valle*. However, the lack of incentives supporting rural teaching left me unable to break even economically, even after seven years in the classroom. I was lured away from the indigenous community of my boys' extended family, and encouraged to scale the ladders of academic and career advancement. Yet I am convinced the goal is not to choose either/or in this dichotomy, but to map out the cultural incongruence that creates the divide, and to document the downside of an epistemological bias in favor of Western values of self-advancement and economic opportunity. (p. 16)

Whereas E. J. R. David opened my eyes to indigenous scholarship, including important areas like indigenous psychology, Smith (1999), Wilson (2008), and Chilisa (2012) added depth, texture, and a new wave of reflection to my nascent understanding.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Shawn Wilson, & Bagele Chilisa. During my recent relocation to the Rio Grande Valley, as I began the process of sifting and sorting through boxes of books, many smuggled out of the University of Texas library and renewed online *ad infinitum*, I organized dissertation-related texts into three categories.

On a top shelf I placed books only tangentially related to the topic of my dissertation, drawn from the widest array of disciplines, which oft unconsciously advance a narrative of White supremacy. On a second shelf I placed books that grappled *explicitly* with the ideologies that undergird our unequal social structures, mostly critical texts but a rare few which are unapologetic in their praise of White (or "Western") supremacy (e.g. Ferguson, 2011). A third shelf housed a very specific set of texts focused on the methodologies central to my research. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's canonical text, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) sits on this third shelf, but should truthfully occupy the second shelf as well. Smith is joined in this transcendent, second/third shelf placement by Shawn Wilson (2008), and Bagele Chilisa (2012).

Smith (1999) demonstrates courage when she rejects the colonial research paradigm, and insists "research methodologies need to be decolonized to be of use to Indigenous peoples" (Wilson, 2008, p. 38). Wilson extends this further, arguing that Indigenous research "must leave behind dominant paradigms and follow an Indigenous research paradigm" (p. 38). Chilisa (2012) answers this call in her chapter on "Postcolonial Indigenous Research Paradigms", though I fear that accepting we are in a *postcolonial* state may be a concession of power to colonialism's modern proponents and benefactors (i.e. White men in charge), in the same way that *postracial* adherents may attempt to awkwardly ignore the perpetual reproduction of racial segregation. However, claims of a postcolonial period may refer to the idea that resistance through indigenous knowledge promises a disruption of the formerly uncontested colonial project. Chilisa herself echoes this notion and declares that use of the term postcolonial denotes a "continuous struggle of non-Western societies . . ., indigenous peoples, and historically marginalized groups to resist suppression of their ways of knowing" (2012, p. 12). Elabor-Idemudia (2000), whom Chilisa

cites, declares that oral, indigenous forms of knowledge are "long muted by centuries of colonialism and cultural imperialism" (p. 103). These indigenous epistemologies are not peripheral; they are political. They are about reclaiming power. It is important to note that indigenous paradigms are place-based, and each cultural community represents and constructs knowledge through their local, at times *sacred* practices.

Indeed, in a recent trip to New Zealand I was welcomed with my then fiancé into a sacred tribal *marae* and discussed with my Maori hosts a too-familiar legacy of colonization. These experiences—brief but potent—convinced me to change my dissertation blog title from "American Inequality" to the more cosmopolitan "Radical Origins," and to read more research on indigenous scholarship from outside the United States. I previously considered it presumptuous to generalize my conclusions drawn primarily from Américo-Paredes to a global context. Now I would consider it presumptuous *and* offensive to locate oppression entirely within a (Mexican) American context. I am emboldened in this work by the examples of courage provided by indigenous scholars like Smith, Wilson, and Chilisa.

bell hooks. While I have cited hooks (admittedly superficially) throughout this dissertation, it is appropriate to focus on her path-breaking work in feminist theory as I conclude this selective set of profiles in courage. Among these profiles, I am least familiar with hooks' work (1981, 1984, 2004), and generally feminist theory has been least revealed to me through my doctoral coursework, addressed during a single week in only one among dozens of departmental courses. I reflect every so often on Pallas' (2001) claim that graduate students are the recipients of their professors' sociocultural inheritance, a default *AOEM* passed down from generation to generation with only occasional mutations. It should be a sign of a natural

progression from obedient 'student' to independent 'scholar and researcher' that blind spots in the literature (a debt inherited?) drive the emergent researcher into unfamiliar texts with equal doses of curiosity and conscientious penitence. Thus, I now confess to learn as much from developing hooks' profile as the reader may gain from reading it.

Interestingly, and consistent with the theme of ideas as memes, I have carried a copy of hooks' *Feminist theory from margin to center* (1984) within my personal library for ten years. At times, I indulge in the fantasy that I am consistently able to visit an unfamiliar bookseller and to select from among countless shelves of unfamiliar texts a single canonical work; that there is an element of destiny in these selections. While this may mark me for ridicule, within the first words of hooks' (1984) preface, which I imagine I have perused numerous times to little significant effect, is now suddenly found a statement of profound relevance:

> To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in, and people we could not look directly in the face. Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks, to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town.
>
> There were laws to ensure our return. To not return was to risk being punished. Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the

> center as well as on the margin. We understood both. . . . Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole. (preface)

As you may recall, in the opening paragraphs of the first chapter of this dissertation I note the "once great" railroad tracks that both defined and divided Américo and Paredes. It was only after a fresh reading of this preface to hooks' text that a lightning bolt struck and I realized guiltily that I had described the very instrument of marginality in glowing terms. bell hooks' "daily reminder" was harder for me to consciously recollect, rooted as I am in a privileged White upbringing and *AOEM*. Américo and Paredes were in fact subject to similar laws that targeted Hispanics. In fact, my forgetting is inexcusable, since I was 'randomly' interviewed and quoted in a 2008 article (source omitted) in a regional paper honoring the formal elimination of the then 76-year-old "blue law" in Américo. As the article describes:

> For many residents here, history is often lost – albeit not completely forgotten.
>
> That's what local leaders and community members all seemed to say they felt . . . when the city unanimously abolished a 76-year-old law that divided the city between "Spanish or Mexican" and "American" residents.
>
> Enacted on Dec. 9, 1931, the ordinance barred any Hispanic resident from occupying "any building on the American side or portion" of [Américo] – except for servants or maids.
>
> A virtual line was drawn . . . which roughly cuts north-to-south through the center of the city. Violators faced a fine of up to $100 – more than $1,400 today, when adjusted for inflation – for breaking the law.

"It did not matter that my parents and family were upstanding citizens of [Américo]," [a U.S. congressman born in Américo] said in a statement. "It was our last name and family lineage that defined who we were and where we could live. That type of treatment stays in your mind forever."

Not everyone in the audience on Monday was Hispanic.

Michael Barnes, a 23-year-old who teachers 7th and 8th grade mathematics in the [Américo-Paredes] school district, came to the city after graduating from college in Minnesota and joining the "Teach For America" program.

With a wedding planned for July, he said he has no plans of leaving.

"It's good for them to be reminded of these stories from the past," Barnes said.

"As one of the few Anglo residents here, I am living here proudly and indefinitely."

I recall cringing then, and even more so now, at the parsing of my words and the resulting phrase "good for them"—I had been referring to my students and the value of informing them of the local history—but there are elements that I am better able to explicitly describe now. For example, my adoption of the local term "Anglo" and even the fact that I warrant seven lines of precious newsprint as compared to the locally-born congressman's four. Imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy indeed.

Self-reflection aside, the similarity between hooks' lived experience and the current residents of Américo-Paredes is striking, given a vast geographical distance and a demographic shift from an African American to an Hispanic community. And since "that type of treatment stays in your mind forever" it is doubtless now a topic to address explicitly with my research

participants/friends. The dual role of participant/friend is key to my axiology of relationality. As my methodology reveals, there is even a planned late stage of research transparency in which my participants can reflect on hooks' words, the 2008 article, and these very paragraphs, as they will be invited (though not compelled) to co-construct knowledge, including an opportunity to reject many of the claims I am so carefully layering into this work. This is similar to *member checking* (Spradley, 1979) in ethnographic research, but without locating just one, or a few isolated individuals in a privileged position to validate local cultural truths. Hence, to hooks I already owe a debt (or at least credit) for furthering the quality, authenticity, and rigor of my dissertation research.

The Path to Colonization 2.0

Emboldened now with the counter-stories of my textual mentors, as represented by the preceding profiles in courage, Colonization 2.0 embraces an evolutionary approach consistent with Fanon's discussion of how "political, social, and economic institutions" (1963, p. 55) including educational systems, continually benefit the colonizer while subjugating the colonized. Key to perpetuating these institutions is "colonization of the mind" (Fanon, 1963). This form of *inception* (Legendary Pictures, 2010) ensures the colonized become colonizers (Villenas, 1996), adopting with minimal interrogation the values, worldview, ways of knowing, and methodologies of their oppressors. Unlike neo-colonialism (Nkrumah, 1965), Colonization 2.0 does not require active participation by outside forces, but describes a distributed, decentralized system that shifts accountability for inequity from the colonizers to the colonized, and who can then take the place of departing colonizers.

As Duncan-Andrade (2009) addresses indirectly, relocating accountability for the perpetual effects of colonization onto the colonized can be achieved by affecting a rhetoric of "hokey hope", which presumes the existence of a "multicultural, middle-class opportunity structure that is inaccessible to the overwhelming majority of working-class, urban youth of color" (p. 183). This false narrative, which becomes a "common sense" sociocultural assumption "largely delegitimizes the pain that urban youth experience as a result of a persistently unequal society" (p. 183).

Critical Race Theory in this framework considers contemporary students as "canaries in the coal mine" (Guinier & Torres, 2002), helping identify the harms imposed most acutely by colonization on densely segregated racial and ethnic minorities. It was the powerful capacity for CRT to account for disturbing, stubborn sets of data that drew me away from my early plan for a dissertation. Upon arrival at UT-Austin, I thought I might examine how (seemingly positive) biases concerning gifted students' capacities leads them to be underresourced in the APISD community within the Rio Grande Valley. Instead, CRT drew me to consider as my dissertation focus a provocative query that represents the origin of my three formal research questions: *Is the seemingly perpetual "failure" of educational institutions—despite historically unprecedented inflows of capital driven by the best intentions—actually an intended feature in an oppressive system?* (see Lewis & Diamond, 2015)

In seeking to define the contours of that massive system of *civilizational racism* (Scheurich & Young, 1997), I made one more distinct pivot, away from CRT exclusively, and toward an intersectional framework of colonization. Colonization 2.0 is helpful here, as it adds a layer of nuance. The "failure" ascribed to students and their families, and APISD school board

members, by an imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy is socially constructed and intended to marginalize indigenous and minority communities by positioning them as inferior. Yet, it is also essential to colonize the *AOEM* of oppressed peoples, so that when Whites depart, as they did in APISD, there is no one left to blame but the indigenous/minoritized selves. In place of an explicit master, a mirror now rests. Yet behind that mirror Whiteness still lurks!

APISD board members frequently reference a long history of political tumult, which makes it hard to interpret past and present schooling practices meaningfully without locating them within a larger socio-political context. There are a variety of elements at play in Colonization 2.0, however, including unequal distributions of *social capital* (Lareau, 1987), and pressure for students to accept a process of *normalization* (Tyack, 1974) that often *essentializes* identity markers, creating punishing binaries that conflict with marginalized students' self-perceptions of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. These sociocultural forces operate in the presence of a powerful curriculum, both explicit and hidden (Jackson, 1990; Kumashiro, 2001; Nelsen, 1981), which is woven throughout the schooling experience.

This curriculum both informs and responds to the relationships between Hispanic students, parents, teachers, administrators, as well as historically under-examined board members of color (Land, 2002), and even state officials that are increasingly involved in the outcomes of individual students' lives. These sociocultural influences mean that students' experiences in schools can vary dramatically based on their individual identity and family context. To help establish how race, gender, and class are *socialized* through schooling, I emphasize key research in each category. First, however, I explore the implications of reproductive theories of schooling, as well as the inherent power of the hidden curriculum, which constitutes an *invisible*

structure I address when describing social network theory in Chapter 3.

Schooling as social reproduction. My research paradigm aligns well with a critical, reproductive theoretical frame. Key to this foundation is the idea that schooling is designed, whether intentional or unintentional, as a means of *reproducing cultural inequity* (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995) through the perpetuation of harmful epistemologies, supporting institutions, and overt as well as subtextual, or covert actions and messages (Scheurich & Young, 1997). This is consistent with MacLeod's (2009) description that schools "reinforce social inequality while pretending to do the opposite" (p. 11). A theory of schooling as social reproduction is derived from determinists Bowles and Gintis (1976), modified to incorporate *cultural capital* (Bourdieu & Nice, 1977), and extended by others (Willis, 1977), for example to introduce analyses of *linguistic social capital* (Bernstein, 1977; Heath, 1983). My approach is defined as critical because there is an assumption, consistent with Giroux (1983) that a potent human agency is inherently in conflict so long as there is cultural incongruence between the actor and society. This agency, especially if acted upon in collaboration with participants in social justice movements, can thus influence and ultimately disrupt oppressive structures. Or at least, participants may negotiate their position in relation to the system of reproduction—so that we enable an increasingly greater share of persons (within families and/or communities) to experience authentic self-empowerment. This is consistent with a variety of recent perspectives, including a movement toward *anti-oppression* (Kumashiro, 2001), as well as *decolonization* (David, 2013a).

The hidden curriculum. Research that interrogates the hidden curriculum is of great value because it illuminates the forces driving cultural reproduction through schooling. As Kumashiro (2001) expresses:

> By learning about only certain groups and perspectives in society, students are not learning about alternative perspectives and the contributions, experiences, and identities of Others, and by not learning such knowledge, students are not troubling the (mis)knowledge they already have. Silence and exclusion are significant parts of the "hidden curriculum" being taught in schools—a hidden curriculum that sanctions the partial and oppressive knowledges already in schools and society. (p. 3)

Kimashiro (2001) also notes how the hidden curriculum may seem initially troubling only to those whose culture is incongruent to the dominant group. However, because even those who feel empowered, advantaged, or enabled by their cultural congruence with the dominant group possess untroubled "misknowledge," they too are disadvantaged.

Intersections of Race, Gender, and Class. One of the most pernicious effects of a hidden curriculum around race are the implications of genetic inferiority that have previously been expressed in explicit terms in science textbooks (Donovan, 2014) as well as more subtly conveyed in the hidden curriculum around participation rates in gifted and talented (GT) versus special education (SpEd) programs. These two programs represent respectively (GT vs. SpEd) the high and low end of the classic "bell curve" (Herrnstein & Murray, 2004), which presumes a state of essentialized intelligence where IQ tests and other instruments can definitively determine smartness. Research, however, does not affirm this approach, and shows that both GT and SpEd programs contribute to the social construction present in schooling, due to disproportionately low

(GT) and high (SpEd) minority rates of participation (Elhoweris, 2008; Beratan, 2008; Hosp & Reschly, 2004).

It is also important to note that these programs for "exceptional students" – a term that seems harsh in its irony given the racialized nature of participation – also reveal intersectionality, as gender is another key factor in participation, with females being underrepresented in GT programs (Bianco, Harris, Garrison-Wade, & Leech, 2011). In fact, when students walk into schools they are subjected to gendered treatments at almost every stage of their experience. This is true both contemporarily (Hernández, González, & Sánchez, 2013), and historically (Schwager, 1987). As Hernández explains, the school is "the most important center in the formation of the personality of men and women," and ideally should "be the primary space for education in the perspective of gender, and in this way, to be able to correct any type of social inequity" (p. 91). In reality, that is not the case. Far too often the gendered norms of schooling go uncritically examined.

It is important to establish that the hidden curriculum, and cultural reproduction in schooling, are not exclusive to one or another facet of a student's identity. Intersectionality is key in exploring the hidden curriculum (Nelsen, 1981). In many ways though, social class was the original driver behind discussions of the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1990) and still motivates evolving theories of social capital (Lareau, 1987). Indeed, the key to preserving *structured silences* (Diaz-Greenberg, 2003) around race and gender may rest in advancing theories of schooling as constructing class exclusively.

Emic Theory. While it may seem audacious to submit as a theoretical framework a novel, syncretic construct—Colonization 2.0—that accounts for both present day and historic

colonization, the strands of theory applied to this framework *a priori* were insufficient to account for findings that emerged through the research process. As I explore in my methodology section (Chapter 3), I examined the power of *discourse* and *textual analysis*, and *network analysis* to assist in the process of generating inferences from the data in my pilot. Additional theories emerged as the research progressed from pilot to a stage sufficient to conclude the dissertation.

The biggest example thus far is research concerning a *cultural political economy*, which is an academic term that helps establish how hierarchies emerge according to the relative cultural congruence and economic status of a given individual or community. As Lipman (2013) and Sayer (2001) explore, a cultural political economy is a contemporary, critical reaction to classical notions of political economy that assume an egalitarian distribution of access to information, and ultimately power. However, as our early research suggests, power, even among a near-exclusively financially-impoverished, Hispanic township is not distributed equally, but rather disproportionally across multiple axes.

Another instance of emic theory, which escaped inclusion in this section until after the dissertation defense, are lay theories of child development. As I reviewed the 'dialogues as data' in Chapter IV, and contemplated why inequality persists in the present-day, I saw that my participants/friends each referenced in their own way a set of stereotypes about young people, which are rooted in what developmental psychologists call "lay theories of child development" (Bernardo et al., 2016; Furnham & Weir, 1996). These are beliefs in what makes for a 'good' or 'bad' child, and consequently a 'successful' or 'failing' adult. Often these are beliefs that are so entrenched as to appear as immutable laws of nature, locating them as a form of ontology. The problem is, stereotypes of this nature are 'one size fits none' straightjackets that somehow allow

participants/friends to rationalize away excessive suffering and failure, and to simply accept that extreme rates of 'bad children' dwell in APISD and the RGV alike. Drawing from Nadal (2004) and others who explore identity development models, this could be an instance of group-deprecation, manifesting itself as *deficit thinking* (Delpit, 1995) toward the average young person in the community. In some rare instances, participants seemed to loosen their hold on lay theories of child development, especially if they reflected that White oppression was the driver behind a harmful lay theory, which now can (more?) safely be discarded.

Differentiating Colonization 2.0. Colonization 2.0 differs notably from the theory of neo-colonialism, which resists the imposition of dominant culture upon indigenous communities from outside agents (e.g. WTO, IMF) who represent the interests of former colonial powers (Nkrumah, 1965; Ryan, 2008). Capitalism, in the neo-colonial model, is not a free hand (*laissez-faire*) but a cloaked hand guided by former colonial masters. By contrast, what I theorize and seek to evaluate in Américo-Paredes, and the Rio Grande Valley, is a colonized mind. This colonization is an internalized oppression that represents the adoption of specific White axiologies (i.e. freedom, individuality), ontologies (realism), epistemologies (scientific method), and methodologies (participation in human labor markets). Furthermore, the agents of oppression are decentralized, operating both within and outside of the APISD community and culture, and perform independent functions without coordination.

An APISD teacher today, for example, may refer students to an assistant principal, who may "swat" or spank children with several strikes from a large paddle, and when desired they may direct the student to a judge, who may fine the parents, or a juvenile detention center, or the "behavioral center" (mental health ward), which serve collectively to impose violence to enforce

obedience through fear. This process during a past time (pre-1968) may have been manifested in a single agent endowed with greater individual influence (e.g. the White racist principal), but today consists of multiple persons, most drawn from a familiar Hispanic culture, and several of whom are positioned with kind voices and pleasant demeanors to signal the sincerity of their intentions to 'help' APISD students.

Critical Race Theory, by contrast, can account for the internalized oppression observed in APISD, but doesn't explore the historical roots of this conflict, dating back thousands of years to the nascent emergence of a Western imperialist monoculture, and the simultaneous development in Mesoamerica of the sacred Mother, *maíz*. The use of the syncretic term Colonization 2.0 invokes the modern struggle, while retaining reference to the origin of much of America's, and certainly South Texas' legacy of oppression. Furthermore, while Nkrumah declares neo-colonialism the "last phase" of imperialism, Colonization 2.0 does not presume an end state, and invites an 'open source' approach for scholars to refine the crude model (to create version 2.1), or alternatively to propose subsequent and future stages (Colonization 3.0?).

Additionally, while not the main intention, the term conjures up images of the omnipresent technology that is meant to be the penultimate gift of a White supremacist monoculture. While I have not consciously explored themes related to technology in our current oral histories, there is a profound technological divide throughout America and the RGV that leaves our children of color "stuck in the shallow end" of the metaphorical pool (Margolis, Estrella, Goode, Holme, & Nao, 2010). Furthermore, it was the invention of the modern industrial food system, rife with new technologies, which led to a dramatic loss of biodiversity, in inverse proportion to the scaling up of a White supremacist monoculture.

To help contextualize and make clear how Colonization 2.0 functions, I introduce an example that at first seems purely historical, though relevant to the ancestries of many in APISD and the broader South Texas Hispanic culture. By the end, however, I reveal how this example manifests itself in a punishing reality for children born today in APISD, and the RGV. While a White *AOEM* might place blame solely on the contemporary individuals, and their parents, for making poor 'choices' in an economic marketplace, this narrative, operating from an *AEOM* that accepts and operates through the theory of Colonization 2.0, sees instead the most recent stages of colonial oppression that place blame on its historical and current cultural victims.

Tracing the Cycle of Colonization 2.0: From *Maíz* to McDonald's

The benefits of biodiversity. The grass that science classifies as *Zea mays*, "one of earth's greatest cultural and biological assets" (Mann, 2011, p. 218) first emerged as a sacred Mother to a great many of the indigenous peoples throughout Mesoamerica (Rodríguez, 2014; Standage, 2009). In the *Popul Vuh*, a sacred Mayan text, a creation story details how their Gods crafted the first men: "Of yellow maize and of white maize they made their flesh; of corn-meal dough they made the arms and the legs of man" (Standage, p. 13). This sacred relationship is one of mutual reverence, for *maíz* "cannot grow without human care and human beings cannot grow without *maíz*" (Rodríguez, p. xvi). That *maíz* cannot grow without human care is actually biological fact, as the husk that protects the corn kernels also prevents the seed from reproducing naturally.

The development of that distinctive pest- and weather-resistant husk demonstrates compelling evidence—grudgingly accepted by 'the academy'—of genetic cross-pollination 9,000 years before Gregor Mendel began experimenting with pea pods (Doebley, 2004). The

more than fifty varieties of *maíz* cultivated over the subsequent millennia by indigenous communities comes in a wide range of colors (Figure 2), from red to "blue, yellow, orange, black, pink, purple, creamy white, multicolored . . . [and] reflects the region's jumble of cultures and ecological zones" (Mann, 2011, pp. 223).

Figure 2. Samples of preserved *maíz* varieties from South America (1930s)
source: American Museum of Natural History, Catalog No: 40.0/ 5860

The *milpa* system, originally derived from the *Nahuatl* word *tlalmilli*, for a field or plot (Gibson, 1964, p. 267) further locates *maíz* within a diverse ecosystem that guarantees maximum nutrition and sustainability. The *milpa*, which involves neither plowing nor planting in neat rows, may look at first glance "like an abandoned area after a forest fire" (Weatherford, 2010, pp. 106-107). The *maíz* is planted by placing a single seed into a small mound of dirt, which reduces soil erosion from rain runoff. These small mounds, typically seeded with a mixture of corn, squash, and beans, among other plants, are scattered about the field, yet a seemingly random pattern when set before a watchful eye reveals great care and planning. As Weatherford (2010) describes in vivid detail:

> The broad leaves of the hardy corn plant shade the delicate bean plants from the harsh sun, and the strong corn stalk provides a living stake on which the bean and squash vines grow. The squash vines meander across the ground between the corn and bean plants, providing good cover for the earth and thereby ensuring maximum capture of rain and minimal erosion of the land from wind or water. . . . the broad leaves and long vines of the squash plant so effectively cover the ground that they prevent unwanted plants from growing. This reduces the need for weeding while ensuring a better harvest. In turn, the beans fix nitrogen in the soil to help the corn and squash grow. . . . the combination of corn, squash, and beans also reduces herbivory, or the destruction of the plants by insects and other pests. The cultivated plants attract predatory insects that prey upon the pests. This limits corn loss without the use of chemical insecticides. Plants that at first appear to be weeds growing around the edges of the garden also attract pests away from the crop plants. (pp. 107-108)

This "polyculture" approach to the growth of *maíz* has been shown to increase yields by as much as 50 percent when compared to monocultures of corn (p. 108). This is impressive given that in either form *maíz* "yields more grain per acre than any other cereal" by a wide margin (Mann, 2011, p. 66). For example, in Europe, wheat produced 4 to 6 times the grain when measured against the amount of seed sown, while *maíz* returned 100 to 200 times the grain (Standage, p. 113). In addition, the chemical profiles of *maíz* and beans are complementary, creating a "nutritionally complete meal" only when combined (Mann, p. 226). The popularity of the polyculture approach to *maíz* championed by the *milpa* system is evident from similar accounts shared by indigenous communities separated by great distances across great spans of

time. Wilcox (2010) describes how the *O'Odham* people—assigned the name "Pima" by Spanish *conquistadors* in a confused early exchange—diverted water "from the Gila River into an elaborate system of canals which fed expansive fields of wheat, cotton, corn, melons and squashes" (p. 94). Across the continent at Plymouth, *Tisquantum*, often referred to as "Squanto," saved the first Pilgrims by teaching them the *milpa* technique of planting *maíz* kernels in dirt mounds "accompanied by beans and squash that would later twine themselves up the tall stalks" (Mann, p. 38).

White colonists and farmers from the 1700s to the early 1900s broadly appropriated the *milpa* practice, referring to it as hilling (p. 106). The word *corn*, imported from England and applied to *maíz*, originally meant "grain" of any kind and was used as a generic term for a region's primary crop. Where *maíz* has been substantially appropriated, modified, or colonized by Europeans and their descendants in America, I assign the "corn" label.

Once harvested, indigenous cultures learned to extract maximal nutrition from the *maíz* through distinct cooking methods. The verb *nixtamalizar* refers to the process of soaking *maíz* in a bath of water and lime (or ash) to produce *nixtamal*, which when finely ground yields *masa* (Mann, 2011, p. 219). Cooking this *masa* yields an indigenous *tortilla*. While many descendants of Mesoamerica, including Hispanics within APISD, are vaguely familiar with these indigenous methods, modern industrial agriculture has created an implicit association between *masa* and *Maseca*, a leading brand of pre-prepared *masa* most often used in creating modern 'from scratch' *tortillas*. This leap omits important elements of indigenous culture and diet, however. As modern science reveals, soaking *maíz* "in a heated alkali solution" as indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica did for millennia "changes it into a form that allows the human body to absorb the

maximum amount of niacin in the corn, increases the calcium in the corn, and makes the protein more easily used by the human body" (Weatherford, 2010, p. 120). Thus, the original *tortilla*, created from *maíz* harvested from a *milpa*, in effect maximizes the conversion of the sun's energy into nutritious calories, with minimal inputs of critical water resources and without pesticides, emphasizing a diverse ecology at every stage.

But the *hombres de maíz* (Asturias, 1977) of Mesoamerica drew more from the *milpa* than nutrition; a *maíz* culture filled with "stories, song, *danza*, theater, art, oral traditions, ceremonies, rituals, celebrations, and diet [endured] . . . despite centuries of efforts to eradicate it" (Rodríguez, 2014, pp. xxi-xxiv). The story and culture of corn, a perverse step-sibling to *maíz* born sometime after 1492, could be described by comparison as the gradual process of undoing "one of the most successful human inventions ever created" (Mann, p. 226), leading in time to the rise of an international symbol synonymous with American culture, and today's obesity epidemic, the ever-addictive McDonalds meal. As I explore, this epidemic haunts the Rio Grande Valley, and cuts short the projected lifespan of APISD students.

Colonization and commodity corn. As indigenous peoples shared the gift of *maíz* across the continent, it demonstrated great variety, evolving "whatever traits it needed to survive and flourish" and making itself at home "in virtually every microclimate . . . hot or cold, dry or wet, sandy soil or heavy, short day or long" (Pollan, 2006, p. 25). Where conquistadors and colonists alike came upon this sacred Mother, they pressed her into new forms of service that extended far beyond the consumption of a tortilla; somehow the gift of *maíz* as unwrapped never seemed enough. Consider a compilation of Pollan's (2006) examples: corn was brewed into beer and distilled into whiskey; husks were woven into rugs and twine; cobs once shelled were

burned for heat; stacked by the privy they substituted for toilet paper; traders swapped dried, ground corn flour as a currency for slaves in Africa; what meager stores remained were fed to the slaves during the return voyage (pp. 25-26). In these last examples, the colonization of indigenous cultures, inclusive of *maíz*, fueled slavery. Early in the twentieth century, corn even became "a form of intellectual property" (p. 30) when diligent breeders discovered a certain hybrid offspring that only flourished for one generation, and thus prevented farmers from replanting the seeds in the next harvest cycle. Corporations celebrated a sure return on their investment, and scaled the commodified corn with gusto, monopolizing the gift of *maíz* that heretofore was freely shared (p. 31). Beyond this, the thirst for *yield*, the corn equivalent of profit, drove all things.

The corn we eat and recognize as corn today typically comes from sweet corn or white corn varieties, but contributes to less than 3% of the average corn consumption each year in the U.S. (Pollan, 2006, p. 85). The vast majority of the corn consumed in the U.S. is actually a category of commodity corn called *number 2 field corn* (p. 58). Number 2 field corn is an inedible commodity "that must be processed or fed to livestock" before being consumed by people (p. 34). Corn that falls within this category, as determined by rules from the 1856 Chicago Board of Trade, is considered interchangeable on the commodity market. The production of an interchangeable sea of commodity corn led farmers to deprioritize the unique traits associated with their regional corn, and to focus exclusively on increasing yields.

To increase yields, genetic corn variants were developed beginning in the 1920s that could be planted increasingly close together, and were subsequently "bred for thicker stalks and stronger root systems, the better to stand upright in a crowd and withstand mechanical

harvesting" (Pollan, 2006, p. 37). The potential competition among so many plants was eliminated by ensuring each plant "is genetically identical to every other," guaranteeing no single stalk inherits a competitive edge in the pursuit of sunlight, water, or soil nutrients (p. 37).

In the early part of the twentieth century, many farms could feed a family from a great many "different species of plants and animals," with corn being only the fourth most common, accompanied by apples, potatoes, cherries, and "oats, hay, and alfalfa to feed the pigs, cattle, chickens, and horses," who served as beasts of burden before tractors (Pollan, 2006, pp. 34, 38). This abundance of biodiversity fed the farmer and family, supported the soil and livestock, and allowed the farm to withstand a collapse in the market for any one cash crop (p. 38). But increases in yield for corn gradually displaced many of the plants and animals found on early family farms. In time, this led to the transformation of the sustainable family farm into a veritable food desert. Iowans, for example, today import 80 percent of their food (p. 34). Even the family was eventually displaced from the farm, where a few simple tasks now ensured vast monocultures of corn (rotated with monocultures of soybeans to prevent plagues of insects), especially after the introduction of tractors reduced human labor substantially.

The forces in place to promote monocultures of corn accelerated after the 1950s, when an Alabama munitions plant left idle after World War II applied a surplus of ammonium nitrate to the production of chemical fertilizers, which can serve as an "excellent source of nitrogen for plants" (p. 41). These chemical fertilizers' ability to artificially "fix" nitrogen into the soil accelerated the increase in corn yields, and further reduced farmers' dependence on biodiversity, previously an important part of ensuring soil fertility. As the last of the animals were displaced from family farms, a few of these creatures became animal monocultures reintroduced to corn

through the Confined Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO), mini-cities comprised of tens of thousands of feedlot animals.

So what began on the family farm as a "closed ecological loop" with animals consuming the waste products of crops, and crops benefitting from the waste products of animals—*"in fact, when animals live on farms the very idea of waste ceases to exist"* (Pollan, 2006, p. 68)—is now a decentralized set of problems. A fertility problem created on the farm is solved by the sale of chemical fertilizers; a pollution problem created on the feedlot is seldom addressed at all (p. 68).

The relationship between an obsession with yield that promotes monocultures of corn, and an obsession with accelerating profits that promotes genetically-modified monocultures of cows in feedlots is witnessed in the corresponding table (Table 2), which compares rising corn yields to decreased age to slaughter for cows, and suggests an inverse correlation (Figure 3). Indeed, the quest to transform an 80 lb. calf into an 1,100 lb. steer in about 15 months requires "tremendous quantities of corn" combined with "protein and fat supplements"—including *beef tallow*, effectively turning cattle into cannibals—"and an arsenal of new drugs" (Pollan, p. 71).

Table 2.

Increases in corn yields compared to decreases in cows' age to slaughter (Pollan, 2006)

Era	**Corn Yields** (Bushels/Acre)	**Cows Age** at Slaughter
1920s	20	4.5
1950s	75	2.5
2000s	150	1.25

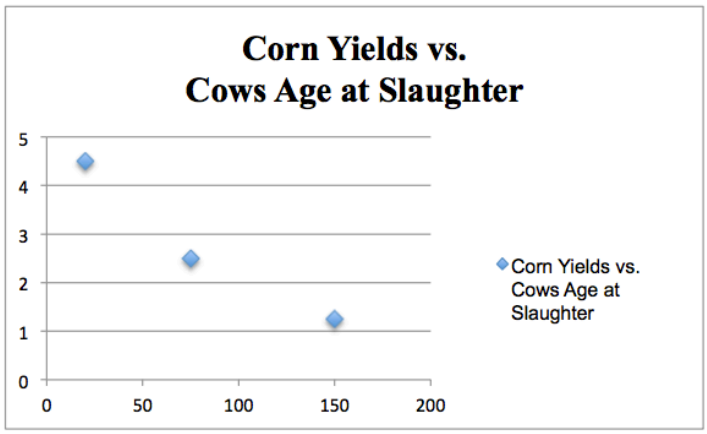

Figure 3. Corn yields compared to cows' age at slaughter (Pollan, 2006, pp. 37, 71)

Tragically, the cow is not biologically equipped to handle more than minute traces of grain in its diet. As a consequence, "virtually all" feedlot cows are sickened by their force-fed, corn-rich diet (Pollan, 2006, p. 77). Bloating is a common problem, whereby the cow's *rumen*, or primary digestive organ evolved to convert grass to protein, "inflates like a balloon" and "presses against the animal's lungs" (p. 77), suffocating an animal unless the pressure is relieved "usually by forcing a hose down the animal's esophagus" (p. 78). Concentrated diets of corn also produce excessive acidity which alters the chemistry of the typically pH neutral rumen. "Over time the acids eat away at the rumen wall, allowing bacteria to enter the animal's bloodstream" and eventually begin to destroy the liver (p. 78).

One strain of that bacteria, *Escherichia coli 0157:*H7, or *E. coli*, can destroy human kidneys and result in death from an ingestion of as little as ten microbes (p. 82). As much as 40% of feedlot cattle carry *E. coli* in their rumen. Essentially, cattle have to reach their full weight by 15 months, or else they might be killed by their cheap diet. But accelerating the age of slaughter doesn't end the health risk for humans. In addition to the risk from exposure to *E. coli*,

corn-fed cows are less healthy than grass-fed counterparts, containing "more saturated fat and less omega-3 fatty acids" (p. 75). Yet corn-fed beef is rewarded by the USDA's grading system.

As Pollan (2006) continues to explain, "the unnaturally rich diet of corn that undermines a steer's health fattens his flesh in a way that undermines the health of the humans who will eat it" (p. 81). What set industrialists in this disturbing direction was profit, due to the low-cost of No. 2 field corn, a low-cost reinforced by USDA subsidy policies that ensure "the price of a bushel of corn is about a dollar beneath the true cost of growing it" (p. 48).

A growing epidemic. As touched on above, there are also health concerns associated with the consumption of corn in the absence of other grains, including protein deficiency and *pellagra*, a lack of niacin, further highlighting the dangers of competitive corn monocultures and the erosion of biodiversity (Mann, 2011; Standage, 2009). These health concerns are compounded by the problems CAFOs introduce, including "polluted water and air, toxic wastes, novel and deadly pathogens" (p. 67).

In addition to uses in CAFOs, No. 2 field corn is diverted to "wet mills" which break down the corn into its component parts and apply chemistry to derive many of the additives that end up in countless supermarket products (Pollan, 2006). These include alcohols like ethanol, and even "resistant starch," an additive that is "virtually indigestible" and designed to add to taste and product consumption without contributing calories (p. 98). Some of the iconic, American products dependent upon corn derivatives include Tang, Cheez Whiz, Cool Whip, and the majority of breakfast cereals (p. 91). In the last case, "four cents worth of commodity corn . . .[is] transformed into four dollars worth of processed food" (p. 93).

The case of ethanol, "the ultimate destination for a tenth of the corn crop" (Pollan, p. 90) is especially tragic because "burning a gallon of corn ethanol produces only about 30 percent more energy than was needed to produce it" (Standage, 2009, p. 40) and the corn needed to fill one 25-gallon gas tank can easily feed someone for an entire year (p. 141). To consume *maíz* directly as an indigenous *tortilla* is to capture "all the energy" from the plant, whereas processing corn through a steer or wet mill leads to a loss of 90 percent of the energy, or more (p. 118).

Obesity has been declared a national epidemic by the U.S. Attorney General (Pollan, 2006, p. 101-102), and landed an American as an oversized version of the objectified Other on the cover of the August, 2004 issue of National Geographic Magazine (figure 4). By 2000, in fact, "the number of people suffering from overnutrition—a billion—had officially surpassed the number suffering from malnutrition—800 million" (p. 102). And the link between commodified corn and diseases related to obesity could not be clearer.

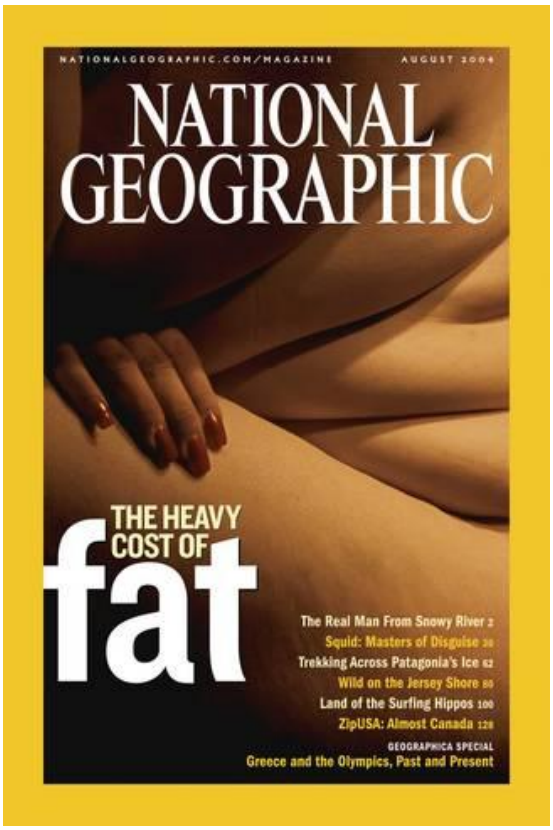

Figure 4. Cover story on the heavy cost of fat (National Geographic, 2004)

In one research study (Stanhope, et. al, 2011), young adults offered beverages sweetened with high fructose corn syrup during daily meals over just a two-week period "experienced a 25 percent jump in their triglycerides, LDL cholesterol, and a fat-binding protein, all markers for heart disease" (Moss, 2014, p.133).

Specifically, "a child born in 2000 has a one-in-three chance of developing diabetes . . . an African American child's chances are two in five" (p. 102), and in the Rio Grande Valley, a child born today is projected not to meet or exceed their parents' life expectancy, due to increases in diabetes, and other obesity-related illnesses (Saslow, 2013).

In recent decades McDonald's restaurants, including the one I noticed in 2006 when driving into Paredes for the first time, have been linked to this epidemic of obesity. Pollan (2006)

went a step farther and had a scientist examine the molecular composition of a meal from McDonald's to see how much of the artificial corn sweeteners ended up in specific products. The resulting McDonald's meal, if passed through a mass spectrometer, reveals that 100% of the carbon present in a soda is derived from corn (high fructose corn syrup), with a hamburger registering 52% (corn-fed beef), and french fries 23% (fried in corn oil) (p. 117).

One in three people in America eat fast food every single day (Pollan, 2006, p.109); in a study performed in a central city near APISD, the average resident ate fast food almost once every day, the highest rate in the country and exceeding the national average three-fold (omitted). According to Pollan (2006) "energy-dense" foods constructed from corn are the cheapest in the grocery store, and it makes "economic sense that people with limited money to spend on food would spend it on the cheapest calories they can find, especially when the cheapest calories—fats and sugars—are precisely the ones offering the biggest neurobiological rewards" (p. 108). Indeed, research shows that an addiction to fat and sugar triggers an addictive release of dopamine similar to that experienced by heroin and cocaine users (Linden, 2011). As an example drawn from animal studies demonstrates, "rats presented with solutions of pure sucrose or tubs of pure lard—goodies they seldom encounter in nature—will gorge themselves sick" (Pollan, p. 107).

A cycle of colonization. For me, the transformation of *maíz* by Whites first served as a metaphor, to help grasp in clear form the structure of colonization at play in the Rio Grande Valley. At one point, with the aid of a classmate, I realized it was in fact a byproduct of the colonization process, a poster-child for Colonization 2.0 (Figure 5). While *maíz* is perhaps the most powerful example of modern colonization in action within the regions inherited from

Mesoamerica, there are countless others. Consider, for example, the indigenous potato whose origins trace back to the land that is modern-day Peru, which was exported to Ireland, then scaled as a monoculture until blight led to mass starvation; today the potato is classified by the EPA as a pesticide rather than a vegetable due to substantial genetic modifications (Pollan, 1998).

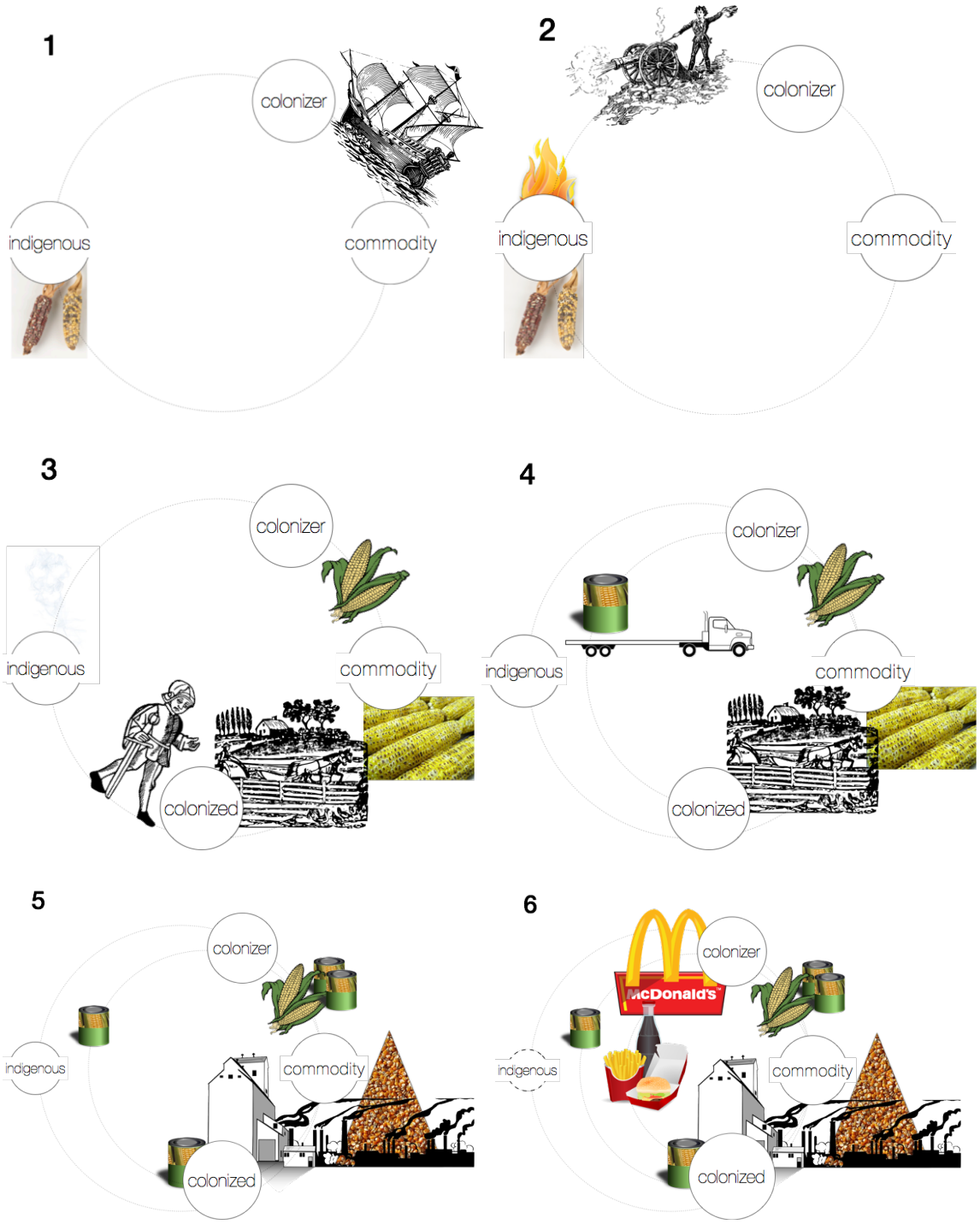

Figure 5. The colonization of *maíz*, visualized as a cycle

image source: public domain graphics courtesy of pixabay.com via CC0 license

In Figure 5 above, we examine six phases of the colonization of *maíz*, and its transformation in parallel with indigenous cultures into a commodity.

Phase 1. This phase represents the time before 1492, when indigenous groups in Mesoamerica maintained a diverse *maíz* species, even while colonizers grew steadily eager to increase their production of commodities to complete in a mercantilist system.

Phase 2. This phase represents the original colonization that came in the form of violent conquest, and led to the extraction of *maíz*, as well as indigenous labor, including via slavery.

Phase 3. We see a colonizer has completed the first 'wave'—colonizing a significant part of the formerly indigenous population, and adding "corn" to his commodity stores. At this point, a colonizer would typically be a nation-state, the actual *conquistadors* serving as mere ambassadors of oppression.

Phase 4. We move away from traditional colonization, and into a process that resembles neo-colonialism, where a canned form of the commodity corn is presented to the indigenous population as a gift, enticing them to engage in commerce while simultaneously growing the proportion of indigenous peoples that are colonized in phase 5.

Phase 5. The growing group of colonized persons (over time) creates the density sufficient to upgrade from an agrarian to an industrial base of commodity production. Notably, the colonized population also purportedly 'benefits' from the commodified form of *maíz*.

Phase 6. The industrial food process succeeds in providing 'new' commodities as 'gifts' technically based off the commodified corn, but concealed so that indigenous populations do not recognize their indigenous *maíz* in the form of a fast food meal. They may enjoy the status a

McDonald's brings, the jobs it guarantees, and the 'taste' of progress, meanwhile the original biodiversity has been replaced by an overwhelming monoculture.

As Figure 5 above illustrates, indigenous societies in Mesoamerica were forced over time to accept colonized versions of their own appropriated goods and ideas, including a holistic "invasion" of a dominant *AOEM* in the form of cultural conquest (Friere, 2000, p. 153). As each successive wave of the invasion ensues—first dense corn, then monoculture corn, then industrial *number two field corn*, delivered as a sea of false choices in supermarket aisles, and concealed by a food chemist's alchemy in a McDonald's happy meal—the indigenous peoples are drawn farther from their roots.

What could have been a shared space of cultural negotiation (phase 1) is now akin to Dubois' (1989) *veil*, a liminal space occupied by many indigenous souls with "two warring ideals in one dark body" (p. 3), a space of perpetual compromise with no visible exit and most critically lacking in power and agency. From this example we can derive a more generalized cycle of colonization (Figure 6). Overall this model is inspired by Harro's cycles of socialization (2000b) and liberation (2000a), however, while those models focus on generic incorporation of persons into a habitus that may adopt a harmful *AOEM* paradigm, (unspecified by Harro but likely White supremacy), here I emphasize how a cycle of colonization affects the *relationship* between indigenous communities and the growing monoculture of the colonizer.

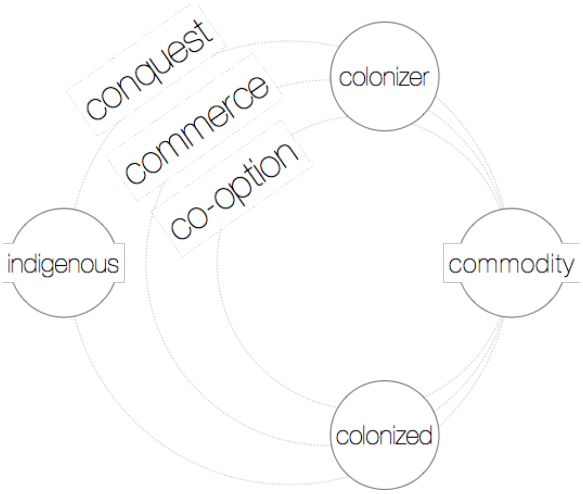

Figure 6. A generalized cycle of colonization

Even the sources that seem to offer helpful evidence to advance this critical narrative hold contradictory positions within an *AOEM* framework. Weatherford (2010), for example, writes that: "There is only one history: the history of the world. There is only one story: the story of humanity" (p. ix). From his perspective "culture is relative, truth is not" (p. ix). Accordingly, despite the great effort he expends in providing counter-narratives about the value of indigenous societies, these cultures are still positioned as subordinate to the broad sweep of "one" human history. In this way, Weatherford validates an axiology of competition that promotes social Darwinism, for indigenous peoples' value appears to lie solely in their ability to "help us" through their "achievements, deeds, and influence . . . in the food we eat, the government we create, the money we use, and the clothes we wear" (pp. ix-x). Most conspicuously, Weatherford implies a universal *we* alongside an assimilated *us*. Similarly, Pollan (2006) writes often about "us" Americans, notably distinct from "Mexicans," or descendants of the Maya who are self-described "corn people" (p. 19). As Pollan implies, "an American like me" would not consciously consider himself one among the *hombres de maíz*.

By contrast, Standage (2009) rejects Weatherford's homogenizing "one" history, and looks beyond a mere "conveyer belt of kings and queens, a series of rising and falling empires" (p.1). His opening chapter invokes Karl Popper, who declares that "there is no history of mankind, there are only many histories of all kinds of aspects of human life" (p. 1). Mann (2011) goes farther, refusing to position the indigenous native as either a barbarian or a "Noble Savage" while instead displaying the critical consciousness needed to respectfully convey indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. As one powerful example, he explores how Western epistemologies led early *conquistadors* and modern scholars alike to judge the Inka "without a written language" (p. 400) despite documented accounts of *khipukamayuq*, or "knot keepers" who shared detailed histories while referencing complex knotted strings known as *khipu* (alternate spellings: *kipu, quipu*).

Only in the past few decades have scholars discovered how *khipu*, through three-dimensional arrays of knots (Figure 7) apply a system of binary notation to encode a complex grammar (Urton, 2003). Mann can embrace this research because he first rejects the ethnocentric hypothesis that anything too complex for modern researchers to decipher must be devoid of value. Curiously, the early *conquistadors* who assumed a similar posture of ontological condescension felt sufficiently threatened by the alternate records of historical events *khipu* contained that in 1583 they ordered them all burned (Mann, 2011, p. 400). Notably, these *khipu*, each knot equipped with a "seven-bit binary array" (p. 402), were first discovered by Europeans more than 100 years before Leibniz 'invented' the modern binary system (Lande, 2014).

Figure 7. An example of an Inka Khipu

source: American Museum of Natural History, Catalog No: 41.2/ 6740

In crafting critical counter-narratives regarding *maíz* and *khipu* alike, I do not mean to romanticize the ancient societies of indigenous peoples, nor do I seek to create oversimplified binaries of indigeneity and modernity. However, by embracing a value of diversity, especially an inclusive biodiversity that does not discount human society and culture, we can arrive at approaches to food, for example, that do not promote competitive monocultures. And these solutions can sustain our cultural diversity as well. Rodríguez' (2014) contemplates how the disconnected ancestors of indigenous Mesoamerica might simply "eat a tortilla" to rediscover their culture (p. 198). This is not just an academic suggestion but an approach to lengthening the lives of young children in the Rio Grande Valley and APISD, who reach for a *tortilla de maíz* but too often find a colonized substitute, served up with a smile.

Chapter III:

Critical Ethnography as Methodology

The methodology of *critical ethnography* (Carspecken, 1996; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996) applied in this dissertation benefits from an early IRB approved pilot, titled "*Somos Familia*: A Social Network Analysis of a South Texas School Board" (Appendix). This pilot eventually led to the adoption of sub-strategies for analysis based on *emic*, or emergent data. Specifically, I adopt an emic strategy of *discourse* and *textual analysis* (primarily of transcribed interviews), and apply *network analysis* in examining subtextual relations, as well as invisible structures that are substantiated by the text. These strategies fall within the overall qualitative methodology of critical ethnography, which connects back to Spradley's (1979) call to apply inference effectively.

However, before I tackle the details of my approaches to inquiry (methodology), which represents the end of the *AOEM* sequence, I will explore how my positionality, specifically my community-centric, relational values (axiology), worldview (ontology), and evolving, consciously decolonizing ways of knowing (epistemology), create a more supportive frame for a methodology appropriate to Américo-Paredes.

Positionality: Resisting Whiteness as an Epistemology

I endorse an emphasis placed on epistemology by education researchers Delgado Bernal (2002), Pallas (2001), and Scheurich & Young (1997). Their call for "epistemological diversity" which contradicts a "recurring pattern of epistemological single-mindedness" (Pallas, p. 7), is key to avoid essentializing "a narrow foundation of knowledge that is based on the social, historical, and cultural experiences of Anglos" (Delgado Bernal, p. 107). To conduct research in

educational spaces without acknowledging a particular epistemological orientation is, in fact, to become complicit in perpetuating an "epistemological racism" (Scheurich & Young) by marginalizing the "unique ways of knowing and understanding the world based on the various raced and gendered experiences of people of color" (Delgado Bernal, p. 107).

When I was in grade school, I would have occasional 'Aha!' moments, which were always internal—never shared or discussed—but constituted collectable insights, curated and recalled at critical decision points. I reassured myself the day I discovered I would earn a 64 in 8th grade math: a 92 on the state exam already guaranteed my Algebra I credit and passage to 9th grade; my GPA was safe because (at that time) middle school grades did not factor into high school calculations. Armed with unspoken knowledge of the system, I realized I could technically fail but still actually succeed, with commendation! These personal moments of gamesmanship, upon reflection, represent a process of accessing the 'right' lessons made available to me in a hidden curriculum. That these lessons were made available to me in particular is, as I assert now, connected to my Whiteness, my masculinity, my heteroflexibility, and my participation in a competitive middle class *AOEM*, eager to game schooling institutions.

A very different approach, which I conceptualize now as the earliest rumblings of a decolonization journey, emerged during my time as an idealistic yet naïve college student. In one distinct memory, I am standing in brisk weather on the old, decaying porch of a simple wood-frame house in St. Paul's predominantly Latin@ "West Side," as Carlos my mentor in community organizing, introduces me to a community elder. As I recall, I tell myself to focus, "to remember all that you see and hear," and now I wonder whether Carlos primed me? In that moment, I reflect and realize for the first time that my path is probably very different from many

of my (predominantly White) high school and college peers. The spaces they occupy will not typically be so rich in culture, but represent instead a monotonous montage of stucco, steel, brick, and/or fresh-painted wood, a shallow façade that mirrors the limited 'knowledge' of the colonized world. Critical reflection at any age may initiate a process of self-interrogation, which has no destination or timeline.

As I grew further in my experience and understanding of critical discourse as praxis, largely through teaching in APISD, I began to discover and appreciate a more complex consciousness within a *system* of education. Now I embrace an epistemology that assumes the internalized schema—the patterns within the lives of those native to my community—are inherently valid, and in keeping with a local, indigenous logic. This epistemology situates community members within APISD, who are predominantly Hispanic as the "holders and creators of knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, p. 106).

A relational axiology. In this work, I adopt an axiology of relationality (Wilson, 2008) and *biodiversity.* The decisions I make as a researcher are driven by how I may best honor my relationships, both individual and with the broader community. This is the goal of a paradigm rooted in relationality. I ultimately aim to locate participants at the center of my research, not as 'subjects' for 'investigation,' or mere props in service to my ideology, but as co-facilitators of research and co-constructors of knowledge. In fact, as I felt compelled to disclose, they are generally felt to be "participants/friends" at this time. The subsequent goal then, is to endow these participants/friends and the communities they represent with a significant status—at least within my research—sufficient to question and contest the oppressive power of the still-dominant Anglo culture (i.e. Whiteness, Western Imperialism).

To provide a forum for equitable negotiation of alternative paradigms (*AOEM*s) is to simulate the broader sociopolitical environment necessary to value biodiversity, inclusive of cultural diversity, in practice, rather than as a rhetorical afterthought. Such an environment seeks to prohibit both explicit and implicit colonization, through direct oppression, or via appropriation and cooption. My methodology, *critical ethnography*, is supported by etic and emic strategies including: *social network analysis* (Carolan, 2013; Deal, Purinton, & Waetjen, 2008), *discourse analysis* (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Fairclough, 2001, 2003) derived from ethnographic interviews, which evolved from a simple protocol into life histories, and even *testimonios*.

As a note on writing style, I have to correct my frequent desire to use quotation marks to express sarcasm, here intended as a form of 'on-the-spot' critical notation. For example, I am especially self-conscious about referring to colonized corn as a gift from White colonizers, rather than a "gift" from White colonizers, which without textual distinction might imply a sincere belief. Hence heretofore such a 'gift' (sarcasm as critical interrogation) will bear single quotes, whereas only words or snippets of verbatim text will bear full quotes. I will continue to use italicization to clarify new *academic* terms, as well as culturally-significant *jargon*, to honor terminology rooted in indigenous knowledge and culture systems, like *maíz*, and occasionally for *emphasis* (usually noted). As well, critical questions will be posed in italics as they arise.

While it may seem a trifle, as a White male steeped in privilege, navigating the hazy space between colonized and colonizer, developing writing habits that regularly trigger conscious reflection (in the absence of lived experience) is helpful to sustain a critical perspective. The time it takes to add accent marks and to italicize is like a rubber band snapping, a reminder to stay constantly alert. It is no surprise that ubiquitous computer software like word

processers (e.g. Microsoft Word) make it difficult to express the accents necessary to convey indigenous tongues, thereby editing out in cold black and White the "wild tongue" (Anzaldúa, 1999). *Am I reading too much into small things? Or is the silence and reinforcing oppression of Colonization 2.0 constructed from 1,000 (daily) 'papercuts'* (McIntosh, 1988)*?*

On *Testimonio*

The precise purpose for *testimonio* varies just as each voice varies, and is affected by a specific sociopolitical context. At one point Sternbach (1991) describes *testimonio* broadly as "breaking silences, raising consciousness, envisioning a new future, and seeking collective action" (p. 95). Sternbach also considers how *testimonio* may "document a vanishing way of life . . . [for those persons] refusing to be rendered historically voiceless" (p. 93). This is especially true for Menchú, who serves as a continual inspiration, and is referenced often (Beverly, 1991; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Sternbach, 1991; Urrieta, Kolano, & Jo, 2015; & Yúdice, 1991). *Testimonios* are not to be taken lightly, and are "traditionally used by the narrator as a denunciation of violence" but also a *narración de urgencia* (Urrieta, 2015, p. 50). Sternbach examines *testimonio* in the familiar context of Latin American atrocities, where they may "serve as repositories of memory, thereby requiring survivors of the dead to recreate those lives posthumously," and avoid "a national or collective amnesia" (p. 93-94). Cervantes-Soon (2012) emphasizes how for the marginalized, these repositories may "reveal the knowledge and wisdom they have gained in their struggle for freedom, dignity, and life" (p. 373). Yúdice (1991) adds a layer of complexity when he describes these *testimonios* as "simultaneously personal and collective" yet consistently rejecting grand or master narratives (p. 15-16).

Yúdice (1991) insightfully compares and contrasts *testimonio* with the postmodern

paradigm, which also passionately encourages "the rejection of master discourses or prevailing frameworks of interpreting the world and the increasing importance of the marginal" (p. 21). However, in the example of the postmodern fiction of Didion (1983), Yúdice notes that while her text is lauded as a contemporary "heart of darkness" it has "nothing whatsoever to do with any empathy with the marginalized persons to whom violence is done" (p. 23). This appropriation of tragedy is perhaps the very definition of adding insult to deep, grievous injury, and we should endeavor to avoid replicating Didion's affront.

***Somos Familia*: The Primer**

The research I conducted in the pilot directly informs my doctoral dissertation. As a cultural researcher working within a space of contested power, it is important to respect powerbrokers and gatekeepers. By talking with predominantly Hispanic school board members (a micro-culture) from periods both past and present (1960-2015), I transform these influencers from potential obstacles into full participants in a broader research agenda. "Roberto" was the primary focus of the pilot project, a board member who graduated from Américo-Paredes High School in the spring of 1968, three months before a nationally recognized student walkout ushered in a new political era of increasing Hispanic prominence (see Table 3).

Table 3

Key events as milestones in Roberto's life

Event	Year
Born in the U.S.	1949
Graduated High School	Spring 1968
First Elected to Board	1978
Served Until	1993
Ran Unsuccessfully	2010

I was surprised, however, by what transpired while conducting the first of many conversations with Roberto. A simple research protocol focused on board governance intuitively gave way to a life history for Roberto, also my friend and a respected community elder. Trauma enacted upon Roberto by oppressive Anglos suggests that his life history may qualify as *testimonio* (Cervantes-Soon, 2012). From this first narrative also emerged a complex set of historical relationships between individuals, institutions, and invisible structures.

Social network analysis. My approach to social network analysis offers a means of visualizing complex systems that arise between people, institutions, and larger conceptual structures. Even something as simple as having a cup of coffee with family and friends may hold deeper meaning. I first met Roberto years ago through *coffee* with my *suegro* (father-in-law), which represents my use of family networks to gain access to the community. As a demonstration of my approach to social network analysis, and to contextualize my place within the community relative to Roberto, consider Figure 8, which doubles as a positionality statement.

As framed in figure 8, *coffee* is a personally significant, and research-relevant institution. In our context, *coffee* is a place where influential Hispanic retirees and White farmer retirees (exclusively men) mix in the morning and discuss, debate, and reflect on political events past and present. In this image (figure 8), in addition to revealing that I married a local APISD "Parakeet" (fictitious mascot), I reveal how Roberto links me to an invisible tertiary structure, specifically framed around politics, that differs from the visible tertiary structure I 'intuitively' accessed at other moments.

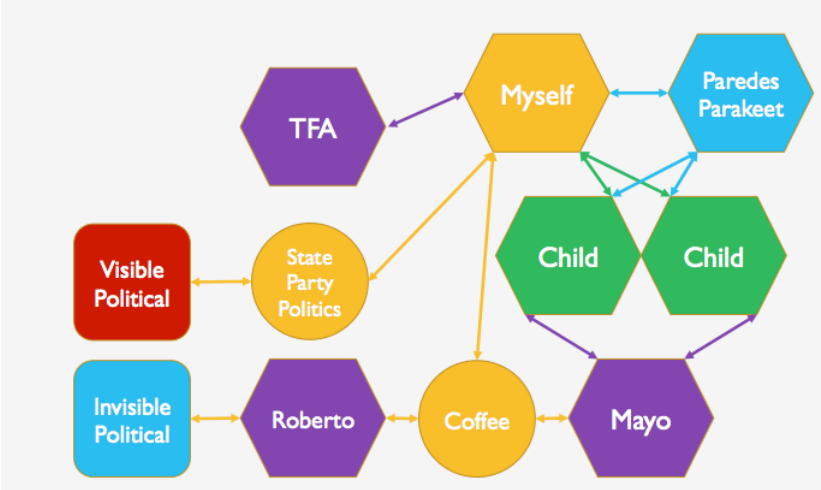

Figure 8. My positionality, and a social network graph connecting me to Roberto

My goal in applying social network analysis is to examine how each board member, whom constitutes a *node* (represented by a hexagon) within a social network, operates within and between *secondary* institutions (represented by a circle), including organized groups such as candidate parties, or *slates*, and how these institutions function in accordance with *tertiary* structures (represented by rectangles), which operate in accordance with *visible* and *invisible* cultural patterns (Doherty, 2006; Deal, et al., 2008). The visible/invisible dichotomy may be characterized as the cultural patterns easily observed by outsider/insider stakeholders. While

these visualizations are sparsely deployed throughout the rest of the dissertation, my conclusions are informed by the use of social network analysis in the pilot. Additionally, given a greater span of time post-publication of the dissertation, it's possible I may revisit this strategy to better help visualize the complex circumstances, for example, surrounding the *politiquera* system.

How I Identify Participants

As per guidelines maintained by the APA 6th edition, several important sources have omitted citations to protect the anonymity of APISD, and the participants/friends in the research. These include: (1) the 2006 legislative performance review, (2) APISD's solicitation of a private loan to cover payroll expenses as reported in a regional newspaper, (3) a regional news article describing candidates' in APISD elections "assisting" voters, (4) an article describing repeal of a 72-year-old "blue law" segregating APISD via the railroad tracks, (5) data from TEA's database concerning APISD's financial and academic performance, and (6) video from a national broadcast drawing attention to the 1968 walkout. As well (7) I mask the multiple academic works of APISD's homegrown scholars "Quito," and "Lauro." Quito is actually one of my research participants/friends. Where Lauro writes with another scholar (his brother, actually) I simply cite the source as "Lauro et al." Omitted sources were offered to dissertation committee members for confirmation and review. As indicated by the use of initial quotation marks, all names of key persons and institutions, including our community of "Américo-Paredes," are omitted and replaced by pseudonyms to afford a measure of anonymity to participants.

In the dissertation defense, we engaged in a healthy discussion of the true nature of anonymity. Here my purpose is not to guarantee that no one will ever 'solve' the mystery of which community, or "South Texas School District" exactly is represented in the text. The

number of details I would have to change or omit to provide ironclad APISD anonymity would eliminate too much of the substance of our data for this research to hold much meaning. As well, all of my participants/friends offered to speak on record, in their actual name. Indeed, I find one of the most endearing qualities of the broader RGV community is a thirst to tell the story, even if it is unflattering. To let a life loudly lived die in the darkness is a greater cultural loss than to accept a measure of infamy/haters' hate. Instead, the idea behind anonymity as applied in this context is to (a) ensure this academic work is not perceived/received as an exposé, (b) limit potential exposure of participants/friends' identity to informed insiders for whom this story is already a central part of their past and future life, and (c) to allow all readers to consider for a moment whether APISD could be their community. As an ethical consideration, my approach to anonymity may seem less rigorous than others, but in fact I am held even more deeply accountable, since this is my community, which I inhabit each week with my family, and my participants are indeed friends, who surely will make me aware of any unintended consequences.

In terms of recruitment of participants, the IRB approved proposal states:

> Board Members that already have a conversational relationship with the PI will be asked to participate in the research. Two such individuals have been consulted in the development of this research proposal, as consistent with a call from indigenous research participants at AERA 2015, to ensure there is "no research about us, without us."
>
> Subsequent participants will be recruited through snowball sampling, with preference given to Board Members who receive frequent mentions across multiple interviews with multiple participants. Semi-random sampling is reserved only in the case

that a substantial number of Board Members receive no mentions, to ensure that certain voices are not privileged above others. (IRB proposal, Appendix, p. 4)

One deviation from the above protocol, which I began to incorporate as soon as the dissertation *proposal* was successfully defended (2016), is to incorporate classmates of board members into the pool for interview. The reason is that, because we are observing a likely cultural political economy within APISD, which creates hierarchies of power, it cannot be presumed that board members speak authentically for the experiences of non-board members, given that board status is very influential, and the highest elected office for which Américo-Paredes residents hold a majority vote. Additionally, I have been encouraged to reach out in some cases to White classmates, who left APISD after the transition to predominantly Hispanic leadership. Hispanic researchers' efforts have found those persons in some cases unwilling to engage in critical dialogue. Yet some early experiences have found White (male) individuals very receptive to talking with me, even if we do not seem to share the same *AOEM*.

These changes have also been approved by the IRB committee as part of an annual renewal process, for which I submitted a revised IRB proposal.

How I Cultivate, Curate? (Data Collection)

The primary data comes from transcriptions of interviews with participants. I completed from 1 to 3 different interviews per participant/friend with each lasting between 45-100 minutes, in a format ranging from conversational to semi-structured. I recorded a total of just more than 17 hours of dialogue with 9 formal participants/friends, 5 of whom are former board members. I did not record conversations where relationality dictated a less intrusive approach. Recordings are being kept on a secure storage device, and I attempted initially to perform all transcriptions,

but eventually utilized a popular paid service for secure transcriptions (Rev.com). The CEO of Rev declined my email request to offer a discount specifically for the transcription of oral histories.

School board members who were repeatedly mentioned across interviews were prioritized for inclusion, as well I included 2 of only 4 (or possibly 6?) females ever to serve on the APISD school board. I conducted the interviews primarily in English with mixed use of Spanish. A general interview protocol (in English and Spanish) encourages explorations of themes, such as board diversity, motivations for participation, election strategies, cooperation and competition in decision-making, and student achievement outcomes. Joanna Sanchez, my doctoral cohort member, who is a native Spanish speaker from the RGV, reviewed my protocol to ensure it is both accurate and applies appropriate language for the region. It is important to note that most participants/friends are bilingual, and their first language is Spanish, so were a more bilingual fluent researcher to conduct the same study, they might find the participants/friends prefer to communicate in Spanish, and this might affect the texture, tone, trust, and even content of the *testimonios*. I believe the answer to most flaws in a single research study, is a call to complete complementary studies that layer meaning upon meaning based on each team or individual's *AOEM*.

Despite my increasing ambition to conduct more interviews, I did not fulfill my ambition to partner with local high school or university students to pay them for a service (transcription) while involving them in basic details of research practice. However, I may seek to build off this work while enlisting high school and college students to conduct oral histories, a concept that has a past precedent in APISD, as I learned from my conversation with "Quito" and "Chris," two

younger-generation board members. Additionally, on the final day of edits to my dissertation, a teacher reached out to introduce me to students conducting independent research inquiries into the APISD 1968 walkout, and hoping to record oral histories with participants. So these can be among the first students I help facilitate on their journey to decolonize their research methods. For my journey, after Stage A (see Figure 9 below), there are some interviews in which a printed transcription is reviewed with the participant/friend while a recording is created. This allows a participant/friend to reflect on their words, and for me to guide them to areas that I believe may hold meaning, but which they can negotiate through the process of member checking.

Additionally, thick descriptions of scenes, settings, and events germane to APISD are included in the data as part of the critical ethnography. Artifacts, such as high school yearbooks, which typically contain most of the classmates for a given period, and feature the board members, have been identified as an optimal source for near-complete information on "who's who." Interestingly, sometimes board politics are so dynamic that multiple seats are vacated within a single academic year.

In addition to this board turnover being a possibly interesting statistic, that might make participants' narratives more valuable than even the primary sources. Generally, I flag any and all documents that relate to our discourse, as well, and apply thoughtful categorization schemes where helpful in organizing and displaying data. At this point, documentation other than transcribed interviews includes the archival contents of UTRGV and the Museum of South Texas History, regarding APISD generally and concerning the 1968 walkout, as well as every available annual/yearbook from the APISD HS library, and oral histories documented by the Llano Grande project, as well as official state documents germane to APISD.

Tools For Analysis

Analysis will generally follow a four-stage framework (Figure 9), which allows participants to gain insights into why the research is being conducted, and what conclusions I draw, at an appropriate time based on the evolution of the research process. This process is exceptionally transparent, but is helpful in holding my claims accountable to the relationships I expect to honor and in some cases extend beyond the timeline of formal research.

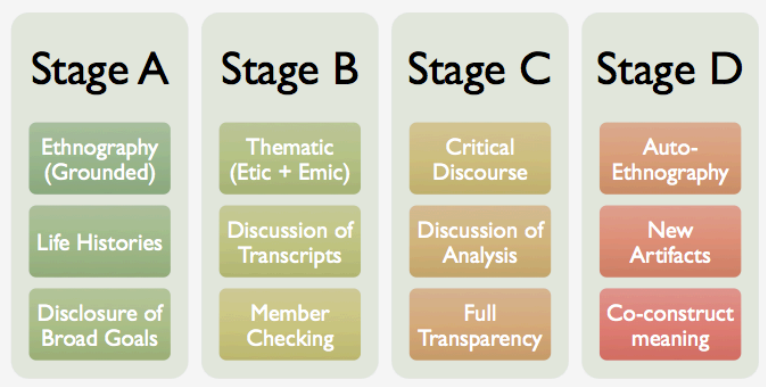

Figure 9. Four stages of the research process organized by level of participants' access

Stage A. This stage represents the etic, or pre-pilot methodologies and assumptions, and involves only basic disclosure, so as not to bias participants, but to give them a good sense that my purpose is not harmful to them. There is a measure of trust involved, which is in part why I have established the other stages. Because I know that still greater transparency awaits my participants, I don't feel deceptive in my practice, merely thoughtful in the timing of certain disclosures. Methodologies applied here include the broad discipline of critical ethnography, through life histories, as well as discourse and textual analysis.

Stage B. This stage represents a post-pilot approach that incorporates some emic theory and methodology. I share transcripts with Roberto and other early participants, as I am interested in reviewing elements of their narrative together. This allows for member checking that informs

assumptions as I continue to introduce myself and this research to new board members, and their classmates. Methodologies for analysis applied here include network analysis, the application of *testimonio* for life histories that invoke historical and enduring trauma, and investigation of a cultural political economy, to name a few.

Stage C. This stage starts to occur at about the time that I discontinue collecting new transcriptions as data for the ethnography, though for some participants this point arrives sooner than for others. In other words, they get to peer behind the researcher's veil, because even if new information arises, it's beyond the point at which I otherwise would have incorporated their voice, their narrative. This requires trust, because I get a sense some researchers will not feel comfortable disclosing too much of the process details for research. In my case, if there is any discomfort in (eventual) full-disclosure, then that is a warning sign; I may have yet more assumptions to interrogate and unpack. In this model, I will be fortunate enough not to do so in isolation. New methodologies here may arise out of critical discourse with participants.

Stage D. Lastly, I am willing to consider new methodologies from within the ethnographer's toolkit, as opportunities arise for community and board members to conduct subsequent auto-ethnography. This is Stage D, which perhaps should have a dotted line instead of a bold line (on Figure 9), to represent the tentative nature of this phase.

On Ethics

I care more about my research participants/friends than myself, which I am surprised to say. There is even a voice within that is probing this statement to test its authenticity. As a White male hoping not to reify an imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy, it is incumbent upon me to be willing to abandon an endeavor, for a period of time or indefinitely, or

even the entire field of educational research, if I suspect that I may be cause more harm than good. To this end, the axiology of *relationality* and *biodiversity* means that I have committed at the root of my paradigm (*AOEM*) to serve my community first. This is the ethics that guides me, but it is not without a cost. On one hand, I feel less 'efficient' in the 'production' of academic work, yet on the other I feel a deep peace in my heart because I am not allowing external factors to compromise the integrity of the research process I consider best for my community.

I am following all formal procedures for professional research, including the maintenance of an approved IRB study, a research protocol in English and Spanish, and a verbal consent script, which are appended in this dissertation (Appendix A). Additionally, I limit the data I collect on participants to preserve anonymity, but where contact data is gathered, it is stored on an electronic device only accessible via password. Upon conclusion of the research, the data will be deleted, and transcripts will be entrusted to participants, who can keep them, destroy them, or preserve them in a local museum or university archive. No pressure will be applied to make any particular choice.

On Limitations

Here I address several limitations of the overall study, including those limitations that might affect generalizability. First, as a representation of the relevant literature, it is always possible to dig deeper, especially with respect to authors whose insights shed light into the specific character of the Rio Grande Valley (Paredes, 1986), as well as "Américo-Paredes" specifically (citations omitted). As one example, Chad Richardson (Richardson & Resendiz, 2006; Richardson & Pisani, 2012) makes reference in his work to as many as 4,000 recordings of oral narratives, produced by students over the course of more than 20 years teaching at the

University of Texas Pan American (now UTRGV). These recordings, which may be sitting unexamined in the local library, are begging to be explored. *Might these recordings include several of the potential participants in this research?* Exciting possibilities for comparative textual analysis may await. In fact, these texts and their accessible sources could positively impact generalizability (or lack thereof) based on a comparison of findings.

Religion and the church, typically the Catholic church, which are a major part of the lives of many Hispanic (and Anglo) residents, and appear symbolically important to many Board members, did not arise in conversations. This structured silence is interesting, especially given the many deep moral issues we discuss that might stir a conscience. Work that interrogates this aspect of life in the region, among the various power and economic classes, and within the schools may be of interest locally and broadly.

Additionally, in each sub-strand of the theoretical model that constitutes Colonization 2.0 I am constantly encouraged to read more deeply, to ensure that I do not accidentally construct straw figures out of the broader body of work associated with indigenous scholarship, for example. Essentially, countless further texts await in libraries, on preserved syllabi, and reading lists recommended by my committee, colleagues, and lay networks of friends and associates.

As far as generalizability is concerned, I intend to focus on a critical ethnography of a single school district (APISD), and even then to focus primarily on board members and their former classmates. To properly acknowledge the distinct features of a community would likely limit generalizability, even across the region. However, in conversations with residents from other small towns scattered throughout the more than 130 mile-wide RGV region, I've found that issues I share from APISD tend to resonate, especially when discussing how "politics is a big

deal here." Interestingly, some locals from alternate locales insist they "never" faced any racist violence in their schools (*NIMBY?*). As for Texas and America as a whole, the generalizability should not necessarily extend into their precise habitus, but rather affect their perceptions of the RGV as outsiders. In ethnography, it seems the solution to challenges with generalizability is to spend more time with more researchers doing vested work in more places, so that unearthing these narratives is a common practice for communities of all persuasions.

On Significance

My investigation reveals there is great significance in contributing to scholarship that examines how board members from a specific cultural community such as APISD impact student success outcomes, as well as the broader health and well-being of the community. This addresses an under-examined area of literature for both educational policy, and educational ethnography. Furthermore, the syncretic, theoretical framework I adopt, Colonization 2.0, will be presented at forthcoming conferences (and hopefully addressed in future journal issues), both within the context of this research, and in a more general way. I intend to provoke people to ask whether it is truly confirmed or merely an assumption that colonization does not persist today. *When we examine the number of non-Whites in particular who are pipelined from schools to prisons, and otherwise subjected to state-backed violence—new videos of police shootings and other forms of violence arise near daily—can we say confidently that freedom predominates now more so than in past eras? And even if people are physically free, can we ensure there is not a broad colonization of the mind at work?*

Lastly, there is significance in the relationships I am developing, between scholars as they are imagined from textual readings, and encountered 'live' in professional settings, as well

as between the participants/friends in my research. Especially since I am committed to extending my research through a stage of critical reflection and even auto-ethnography, these relationships will not be one-way streets meant to enrich a *curriculum vitae*, but rather seeds meant to initiate discourse and community action, whose roots, trunks, and branches ought soon grow well beyond my reach.

Chapter IV:

Results

Over the course of my dissertation and doctoral study, I read and re-read several dozen ethnographies, especially those focused on systems of schooling and socialization/segregation (e.g. MacLeod, 2009; McCarty & Bia, 2002). However, in far too many treatments I find hundreds of pages of analytic text interrupted only sparingly by the actual words of the stakeholders whose lives are being deconstructed and interpreted for the purported benefit of the academic audience, as well as the careers and legacies of the researchers. It seems the quest for generalizability can become an excuse to excise the actual voice of the community, rooted in its distinctive context. To me this resembles the endless variants of Mesoamerican *maíz* whose flavors once spoke of a rich home soil, but have now become an indistinguishable, flavorless, and silent commodity corn, having long since lost the language of their origins. This practice represents a structured silence perpetrated by the academy, an abuse that becomes a cruel irony if the ethnography aspires to dignify and liberate oppressed peoples from unequal power dynamics.

Or perhaps the roots of the problem are not epistemological, but simply creating extended verbatim transcription was just too painful an exercise for busy researchers? Here I benefited from a 'software' (Rev.com) that divided up and then transferred the burden of work to *gig economy* individuals I cannot name, but who are bound by confidentiality agreements. Am I the beneficiary of this commodification of labor? Regardless, I consider the complete transcripts I possess priceless artifacts I will honor, and later entrust to my participants/friends.

I feel it is best to introduce each of the key research participants/friends in their own words. These are not just research participants/friends of course, but members of the APISD

community, leaders formal and informal, passionate purveyors of life in a space where personal freedom and institutional influence were rarely gifted, but typically hotly contested. After these introductions, I proceed in this chapter to briefly analyze the 'results' of the critical ethnography, by revisiting and reflecting upon each of my three research questions in light of the aggregate body of data, including the transcribed, annotated, and thematically coded transcripts.

In Chapter V, I explore the results in depth, layering participants/friends' dialogue into the 'discussion.' During the dissertation defense, I became more acutely aware of how this structure constituted an unorthodox approach. Most discussion sections do not introduce new data, yet in order to create the feel of an actual discussion, I have reserved for inclusion in this section snippets of dialogue that were not revealed in Chapter IV (results). I did not want to have my participants/friends repeat themselves, and except for a few special cases have succeeded in this effort. It is important for me to place participants/friends' voices nearer the analysis (in Chapter V), to place the evidence and justification proximal to the scholarly reflection, and to avoid pontification, and thus I have committed to this structure. However, out of respect for my committee's request to have at least some segment of uncontested analysis by me and me alone, I have added a very brief Chapter VI (conclusion), which functions more as an afterword, but also addresses a few basic policy prescriptions and paths forward for this work in the APISD community. Excitingly, as I send this dissertation to print, some of my participants/friends are already communicating near daily about ways we can collaborate to make a positive impact.

To assist in navigating the geography of the text, Figure 10 shows the relative location of Américo and Paredes, and adjacent communities North Town and East Town, as well as marking the state highways which are the main thoroughfares.

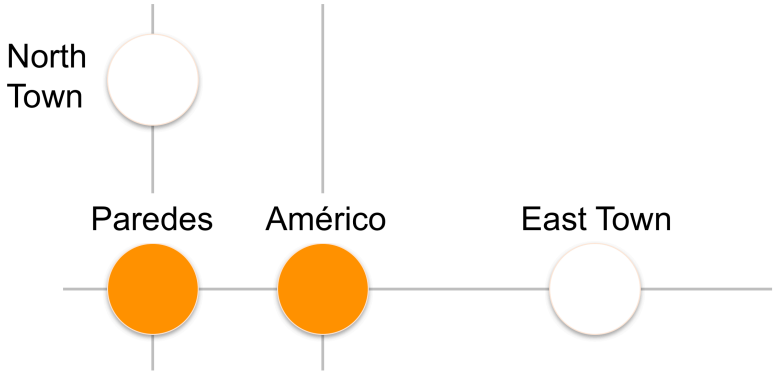

Figure 10. Relative location of Américo-Paredes and nearby communities

To help capture the authentic flow of my conversations with participants/friends in Chapter IV and Chapter V, but also to enhance clarity, at times I will switch from a first-person account by a research participant/friend, into a dialogue, listing the name of each party. [Brackets] are used to clarify meaning and coherence, where verbatim words may have been disconnected from their original context. I apply (parenthesis) to add context as a researcher without necessarily putting words in the participant/friend's mouth. As well, where *jargon* specific to the RGV or APISD appears, I will use italics. Of course, ellipses . . . represent omissions from the verbatim transcription; I use them more liberally here than in most ethnographies, but that reflects the difference in priorities, between exact accuracy in textual data (for a dissertation) and creating a more readable narrative (for a book-length treatment).

Here now, I allow our APISD board members and classmates to speak for themselves. I omit an introduction for Roberto because he was introduced effectively in the methodology section, and he does not need me to carry his conversation.

Roberto

Both sides of my family came from the Mexican state of Nuevo León. They were migrant farm workers. Both of my parents were illiterate. They were sponsored to come across and work for this farmer, about three miles down the road from [my house] here. He guaranteed the [U.S.] government that my parents would not become a burden to this country. He had to sign a piece of paper saying that he would employ this family. He sponsored this family, the entire family, and they all worked for him on his farm, his orchards. They did all the manual labor, but like I said, he had to guarantee that they would not become a burden to this country. . . .

They were migrants. After they stopped working for this farmer that sponsored them and they got all their paperwork in order, their green card, they became legal alien residents. They were here legally.

My parents, since they were illiterate, realized the value of an education, and they decided to make every sacrifice to make sure that we went to school, to the point that my uncles would ridicule my father for sending us to school, because all of my cousins didn't get to go to school. They went to school as long as they were mandated by law to go to school, but as soon as they turned 16, they dropped off from the second grade or third grade. They were way behind, because we would get pulled out of school, so we could migrate up north, whether it was West Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Montana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio. Wherever the crops were, that's where the entire family would migrate as a unit.

My oldest uncle was the *troquero*. He was the general contractor. He negotiated with the farmers and he provided the labor, which was the family. He provided the trucks to transport the family up north, so we would pile in to the back of a truck and that's how we got to wherever the crops were at. . . .

My father and my mother were way ahead of their time. They saw what was coming. Now, I started school late. I was behind my age group, but I caught up. I double promoted and I caught up with my age group, and I was able to graduate from high school, the Américo-Paredes High School, in 1968. . . .

September of 1968 was when *the walkout* took place. When I was going to school, we were not allowed to speak Spanish. In fact, we were sent to the principal's office to get a spanking. We would get spanked. . . . That was with a paddle, and it was not just one, but four or five swings with that paddle. Bent all over. You would grab your knees. Yeah. . . .

All throughout my high school years, the tension was there. The official policy that you would not speak Spanish, that you would not do the cultural things that you associate with Hispanics, the Cinco de Mayo, the certain way you dressed. There was no dress code, but it was easy to spot the poor Hispanics from the Hispanics that were better off or the Anglos. They were very evident.

The grade assignment, even within the grades, you had your upper group and your lower group, and the group of Hispanics, guess what, automatically, you were in the lower group. The expectations were lower. There was segregation. It was very evident.

The biggest problem was the fact that if you spoke Spanish, you were in trouble. Go to the principal's office. Bend over. Boom, poom, poom, poom (simulates swats).

If you were Hispanic, if you didn't speak English perfectly, if you weren't a member of the Hispanics that were better off in the community, you were looked at as someone who was going to dropout along the way, and you were not going to make it in the professional fields. You were going to be in the manual labor field and even if you graduated from high school, you were encouraged to go to TSTI, Texas State Technical Institute.

When I was about to graduate, I was sent to the counselor because all seniors had to go talk to the counselor. I was a member of the National Honor Society. I was class president. I was a member of the *top ten* (class rank). I go and talk to Mrs. S— and she smiled at me and said, "You know, Mexicans are good with their hands. You ought to go to TSTI." I said, "Mrs. S—, I don't know how I'm going to do it, I don't have any money, but I'm going to go to college and get a degree." She said, "Good luck. But again, Mexicans who are good with their hands go to TSTI."

My brother, who's smarter than I am, believed that bullshit, and he went to TSTI, and became a mechanic. To this day he regrets not ever going to college. He has done pretty well for himself, but he could have done a lot better. That was a prevalent attitude throughout my years of school. . . .

[Anyway, tension] had been boiling for a while. I was President of the senior class, and I was the one that kept things under control. I would be the go-between the Anglo administration and the *Hispanic hotheads*, as they were called. I kept things under

control. And, I knew it was coming. All the signs were there. And then, when the people from Crystal City came down and formally organized the students and gave them the push they needed, that's when the walkout occurred. . . . La Raza Unida, José Angel Gutiérrez. That's where it all started, and then it spread down here. . . .

It was inevitable. It was bound to happen because of the policies that were in place against speaking Spanish, the labeling of students; what the criteria was for labeling somebody a troublemaker, somebody a future dropout, somebody a future doctor or lawyer, I don't know. But it was definitely there. It was definitely there. . . .

I graduated from the university, Pan Am (UTPA, now UTRGV) . . . in December '72 . . . that's the only thing I could afford. I got outta the military December '74. Took me a couple years to get my feet on the ground and get established. Get a job. Find a place to live. I'd say I decided to run for school board in January of '78. . . .

Okay. I graduated in 1968. I got on the board in 1978. During that ten year period, the majority of the board was taken over by Hispanics. The majority of the Anglos left the area. And, when I got on the board, there was this attitude of "let's get rid of all the gringos." Of course, I didn't agree with that philosophy, but it was there. We were already in the transition to control city politics, school politics, county politics; all politics. The Hispanic found his voice to vote.

Back in the sixties, there was a poll tax. You had to pay a tax to the [county] to be able to register to vote and most people didn't have the money, so they didn't register to vote. That's the one that I'm most familiar with. There was also a literacy test at one

time. You had to be a property owner to be able to vote. And one by one, those obstacles were eliminated by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. . . .

One by one, these obstacles were eliminated, and more and more Hispanics were able to register to vote, and they started to exercise the right to vote. And once they got a little taste for power, that's when the changes started to happen rather quickly. The Anglos left rural communities like [APISD] and concentrated in [larger cities nearby]. I don't know if it was self-preservation, if it was paranoia, or the fact that they were no longer going to be in control. I don't know, but the mass exodus was very, very noticeable. . . . There was a massive exodus of Anglos from the community once the Mexicans took over the elected positions. The only ones that stayed behind were the big farmers because the land they couldn't take with them. They had to stay on the land.

I had, because of all my experiences, decided long before I ran for school board, that I was going to become a school board member and try to, again, be the go-between, the unrest, and the force to improve. So, even though it took me awhile to finally jump into the race, I had it all planned in my mind, from my years in school. . . .

Roberto's Anglo spouse: Let me tell this one. I had met him when I was 16, and he was 19. And he told me "By the time I'm 35, I'm gonna have my degree, I'm gonna be a business manager, and I'm gonna be on the school board and build a new high school." And at 35 years of age, at the opening of the new high school I was sitting there crying. Nobody could understand why. He was 35 years old, and he was a business manager, and he— he made sure his school got built. . . .

Roberto: I won five consecutive elections. ‘78, ‘81, ‘84, ‘87, ‘90. It used to be a three year term.

[Now, on the board] we had people like J—, who was a successful farmer. He saw himself as a member of the ruling class. He saw himself as the person of reason. He saw himself as the establishment. . . . Patrón is a little harsh. . . . Patrón, okay? The old Patrón system. He was left over from the old system even though he was Hispanic.

You had J—’s *partido*, or his group (political party). And then you had the new group. . . . The [new] group was for throwing out all the old, and bringing in all the new. And J—’s group was going “Nope, no. You can’t throw everything out the window and implement what you have in mind.” . . .

After years, and years, and years of prohibiting Spanish and labeling these individuals that were proud of their Hispanic culture as troublemakers and potential dropouts it was ingrained. It was part of the way of thinking. Then we went the other extreme with this new group. “Let’s get rid of all the gringos. Get rid of all of the policies. Let’s bring in the new way of thinking.” One extreme or the other. There was no middle ground, and that’s where I found myself all the time right in the middle. . . .

I was not tempted by job offers because I was a school board member. I was offered several jobs but I turned them down because I knew once I took the job, I was on the hook. I had to do as my employer wanted me to do, and I didn’t take the job for those reasons. Much better paying jobs. I said “Nope, no, no.” Not gonna compromise my position on the board. I’m not gonna be in debt to anybody. I’m gonna vote my

conscience. And if I fall for the little trap, where "I'll get you a better job," or "I'll get you this and that." No, I stayed in place where I was. Before I ran, and after I won. . . .

The White administration didn't have to play these little games because they were all members of the ruling class. They had their farmlands, they had their businesses. They were set. They were not tempted by job offers. They were not tempted by the usual things that politicians are tempted with. It was a different time and they were set, financially. . . . And they didn't have to worry about getting votes because they would tell their workers how to vote. . . . "You want to keep your job, you vote for me." And that's how it worked. . . .

Even if it's not a written policy, [now] what's in practice is, "You're going to hire nothing but locals. No matter how qualified or unqualified they are. We're going to hire nothing but local." . . . I was always being accused of all kinds of things because I would not agree to hiring only local people.

The board members would say, "You think you're Anglo? You think you're better than everybody else?" Or, "Not everybody's a [Roberto]! What's wrong with hiring local people?"

My answer was always, "If they're equally qualified I'm all for giving them preference, but to hire a *flunky* over a well-qualified person simply because this person is local, no. You're downgrading the competence level of our teaching staff or our administrative staff. I want the best for my kids. No, you're not thinking about the community."

My opposition year after year would always look for illegitimate children, for crooked dealings, for anything in my past that would discredit me, and they couldn't find anything. [Then in 1993] they went out and told the community that I thought of myself as being Anglo and better than everybody else. The community turned on me like you wouldn't believe. . . .

The Hispanics went from being powerless because of the voting restrictions to being in control and possibly out of control. That's what I saw during the period of 1978 to 1993. The blowing up, if your will, of the leadership in the community. There's still a long ways to go, where we forget about past injustices and concentrate on what needs to be done to prepare our kids. I don't think we're quite there, yet. Something's still out of kilter.

Glory.

Glory was one of two female former school board members I spoke to. In the entire history of APISD, from the 1930s to present, there have been at least 4 and at most 6 female school board members. Glory ran for office after her husband, a long-time board member, stepped down and decided not to pursue re-election. Here she describes her journey in her own words:

We went to school in [a city nearby APISD] and of course, there was no high school there at the time. So, we could choose where to go. My [sophomore] year . . . they told me to transfer into Paredes. And that brought me to my present husband. They sat us in alphabetical order and they were just building the biology lab at that time. . . . So, anyway, I was the only one who came to school over here besides my three elder sisters. .

. . They graduated from here. And they did very well. My sister graduated salutatorian. And the other one graduated Miss APISD, Best Sweetheart. Everything that they had for those at that time, she got. . . . There were a lot of Anglos here.

When I went to school there were a lot of Anglos. . . . I got along just fine with them. At the ranch where I grew up, my dad was one of the foreman. There was an Anglo foreman and my dad was a Hispanic. And so they each had their jobs to do. Well, I said, "Lucky for me." Mr. K— (the Anglo foreman) had a daughter that was just a year older than me. So we got along just fine. We rode the bus together to school. Even through high school, we still were good friends. And really good friends. We didn't see as though she's the *gringa* and I'm the Mexican or whatever. . . . We had May Day. I don't know if they still have it. It was fun and games all day and we had a western costume contest and all that. So she let me borrow her outfit for cowgirl, and for the football banquet I borrowed one of her dresses too. So, I haven't seen her in a long, long time, but I still know where she lives.

So, my husband grew up in a different thing. It was his perspective of— although he had real good friends in football, there was still a lot of [anger]. He graduated in '61, I think, the year before me. Because of the athleticism, he got along good there, but he always remembered one incident when he was walking down the hallway, and he bumped into this young lady, and she pushed him out of the way and said, "Why don't you go back to Mexico, you Mexican." And he's never forgotten it.

I couldn't remember an incident where I had any problems like that, but I was involved in sports, and I was in the National Honors Society. I loved going to high

school here. It was a good experience for me. Although we got married before I graduated. He was a senior and I was a junior when we got married.
(Glory graduated in 1962)

I had two kids. But I always wanted to go back to school. So I told you my husband went to work at Texas Plastics, and when O—, the young one, was three, I decided I was going to go look for a job and go to school. And so I did.

And I was a good student, so when you're a good student, and you don't misbehave, you're good with the teachers, and everybody at school, right? [They] got me enrolled in a correspondence [course] at Texas Tech. And they had a typing class after school which I could attend. . . . And I got my diploma.

Coach G— [hired me at the school]. I had graded all his papers when I was in high school. I was always the first one to finish, so I'd turn in my paper, he'd grade it, give it back to me, and I'd grade the rest of them from my paper. And that was kind of a routine. . . . So I started working for the school as a PE aide, and then I transferred to the elementary with Mr. S—. He was the first Hispanic principal at the school . . . And he promoted me from PE aide to the office . . . So I started helping him keep the cafeteria books and stuff like that. He asked me if I would consider working in the office permanently, so, of course, I did.

Finally, got my degree, took me seven years going part-time, but I got it. I went to work for the bank. I left school, and I went to work for First National Bank. I worked there for 12 years . . .. When I left, I was administrative officer. I did all the marketing for the bank. They didn't want me to leave, so they paid me for three more years after I

left and was working at North Town as an English teacher. They paid me for three more years after I left, because the customers from Mexico, they had a lot of money, didn't want anybody else to handle their account. They were gonna look for another bank, or whatever, so the bank paid me a stipend, and I would meet with the customers after school in the evenings.

I love reading. I always wanted to be a teacher. Everybody thought I was crazy, because I was a marketing officer . . .. When I resigned from the bank, I had two pages full of clubs and organizations that I represented for the bank. I would take trips on behalf of the bank to Mexico because the customers wanted the bank to know that they were legit. . . . Yeah, so, I got to go all over Mexico. Then I was a vice president for the chamber of commerce over there. I headed the tourism department. We had a deal where we would organize a sister city trip to Mexico. We went all the way to Taxco. . . . It's south of Mexico City in the mountains. It's called "The Silver City." . . . Silver, yeah. That's what their business is over there. When you're driving up, [it's] so pretty, because you see it higher in the mountains and you can see the city way out there as you're winding, going up to it. It's beautiful. . . . So, people thought I was crazy when I said I was [leaving] but, I'm going to tell you the reason why.

My granddaughter, . . . D—, was seven months old and I had not had the opportunity to babysit her at all. I talked to myself and said, "What am I doing? I love teaching, I can go teach, and I can have more time to spend with my grandchildren." Just at the right time, Mr. B— (superintendent) called me. My husband was on the board, so they had that connection. My husband was serving on the school board. He knew I had

my teaching certificate, and I had a lot of help. . . . I was able to do that because the bank gave me a leave of absence, so I could do my student teaching. So, I took my two weeks' vacation the bank gave me, four weeks leave, and I came in and did my student teaching with Mrs. F— at Américo. So, I got my certificate. . . . And I loved it.

I loved it. Lucky for me, the kids responded really well. I'll tell you a story, so you can see how that went. I would take my class out, and we had a big beautiful tree out in the front yard there at the junior high in North Town. When it was a good afternoon, I'd take my class out there, and we'd read out there [or] whatever we were doing. . . . I took a lot of time picking the stories that we read in class. . . . I really chose my stories, you know, I did one *six weeks* of Greek mythology. Oh, they ate it up, they ate it up. We did projects with it. We did the genealogy, you know, where they research their name and the history and all that stuff. . . . I always had them do something, you know, to go along with whatever we were reading. So, they did very well. Needless to say. . . . We had a great percentage of students passing their tests. So, we were very successful. They made me enjoy my classes even more. . . .

We had done a story about the seven labors of Hercules. I think there were two chapters in the reading . . .. They really loved it. I mean, they really got into it. So, along comes the test. Guess what? The kids were looking at me like [excited look]; they didn't say anything, but they were looking at me like so excited. The two stories were there that we just done like a couple of weeks before. So, they did really well, because we did a thorough study, you know. . . . We culminated with a movie. They looked forward to that. The following class [asked] "When are we going to do the Greek mythology?"

They got excited about the reading. That's really the success of the kids really getting into the reading. They're liking the stories and all that. We had fun with reading.

[One class though, after I was transferred] they had this real negative attitude when I first got them. And they played the first football game, and it was, "Yeah, we lost," and, "We know we're gonna lose," and this. They expected to lose. So I stopped the class. And I said, "Do you know where I'm from?" I said, "I'm from [APISD]." And, "Oh, everybody knows APISD." I said, "Because they always win, right?" I said, "You know what? The students there are not any different from you. But it's their attitude." I said, "Here, they wanna win. For it comes from here (heart). And you guys have already given up before you even play." And they listened. I mean, they sat there, and I gave it to 'em, really hard. You know what? They won. They won that week! And they started winning. And they won district. They came back and they told Mr. V—, the coach, they wanted a t-shirt for Miss Glory. Because we went to their games. We went to see 'em play. And nobody else did, while the other teachers [said], "Hey, where'd you get your t-shirt?" . . . The kids came back, and they appreciated the fact. And they worked hard, and they played hard, and they believed in themselves, and they won. What did it take? It took our going to watch them play, believing in them, and making 'em believe in themselves.

One of these days . . ., I'm gonna sit down and I'm gonna write a book about a lot of my students, and the things that they were able to achieve. . . . You hear their stories, and some of 'em are being abused, and …

I had one student that lived in a little shack in the back of his girlfriend's parents' home. His father was in prison, his mom had abandoned them. And so the kids were with the grandmother in Mexico. But he wanted to go to school. And . . . they have this border patrol thing where they highlight students. . . . I nominated him. . . . He got it.

His name is R—, and he was supposed to be someone who put in extra effort, not our top student. . . . [R—] came to school, very neat, very clean. His shirts were ironed. . . . You would think that he came from a house, and he was always living in a little shack. Sleeping in a little shack, in a cot, in the back of his girlfriend's house. . . . They had a little banquet and everything. At the end, he went to barber school, and he's working as a barber . . .. That's what he said. That he wanted to become a barber. And he achieved his goal, and I was so proud of him. . . .

One of the kids. He was in my first class there. And he came from Mexico. He didn't speak any English. Big boy. Dark. Typical Mexican. And he came to me, and he says he wants to learn the English. Is there any way that he can come after school? I said, "Sure, J—, just come. Come in. I'm here for at least half an hour or 45 minutes after school every day. And I told him, "Do you have a TV at home?" Yes, they had a TV. I said, "Okay, don't watch the *novelas* or the Spanish programs. Watch the English programs. You can pick up a lot of English from that." And I gave him, oh, I had a whole library. And I still have some books in my storage room. Boxes of 'em I donated to the library here. . . . I chose that, first-, second-, third-grade levels. And I gave 'em to him. I said, "When you read those, come back, and I'll give you some more." . . . And he

brought me his honor roll . . .. He brought it to me. I said, "No, no, no, no!" (turns away) He said, "No, Miss G—. I got it because you helped me. And I appreciate it."

I said, "No. You keep it and get another one. And then get another one. And get as many as you can." When he graduated, he wrote me a letter. . . . And [sent] his soccer picture, . . . 'cause I encouraged a lot [and] he was a good soccer player. And his graduation picture, and his school picture. And the most beautiful letter that anybody could get, telling me how much he appreciated the help I had given him. And that he had graduated because I had helped him at the beginning.

But those are the things that make my work as a teacher worthwhile. Didn't get a lot of money when I started working as a teacher, right? I got $200 a month before taxes! And I was making more money at the bank when I left.

Well, we had problems with the superintendent. He's a skirt-chaser. B— and I . . . represented the [union], so the teachers came to us and this would complain about this. Anyway, we took it all the way to TEA [Texas Education Agency] and we won. It took three years, but we did it.

Michael: It seems like a big deal to go and put together a lawsuit against a ...

Glory: That was really big. It was stressful. Our representative, she was a lead counsel for [the union] out of Austin. She warned us. She said, "A lot, [the] biggest percent of people that start give up because of the stress. They're afraid to speak up because going to lose their job, and so on and so forth." B— and I talked about it and we decided we were going to do it. We could not just not do something.

Michael: What kind of pressures did you face?

Glory: Harassment, a lot of harassment. I had the assistant principle come . . . Oh, I got transferred, of course. They put me in the migrant or the Spanish speaking class, teaching English to the non-English speakers in a little room. One day [the assistant principal] walked into my room seven times to observe. They would turn on the intercom. The kids would tell me, "Miss, Miss." (pointing up to a 2-way ceiling intercom) . . .

I had people chasing me, what do you call it— I had a herniated disc. They put me in kindergarten. There was no way I could get on the floor and be with the kids, and whatever . . .. We filed a grievance based on that. I was at a football game and somebody comes and tells me, "You know there's a camera on you." There was a tape. The superintendent got somebody to go and spy on me, take pictures of me climbing up the steps at the football stadium to prove there wasn't anything wrong with me. . . . We did all the paperwork for everything that was going on. Then, we would present it together . . . . We would edit and write, edit and write and whatever. We did a lot of work and it was very stressful. We had somebody spy on us at the office. He'd park down the street, like a block away, and waited for us to leave, and then he would follow us home. It was just, it was really bad. But, we decided we were going to take it, so we did.

They fired G— [my son]. They had one of the teachers accuse him of putting a wet paper towel in her blouse, and Superintendent had him arrested. G— never got involved with anything, but how are they going to get back to me, or back at me? Through G—.

[My husband] was maybe 24 when he first got elected to the Board. And the Anglos voted for him too, because he was very good in football, and they knew him. . . . He was in the 1959 team that went 10 and 0. Everybody knew him, and they know that he was a good guy, so anyway, he got the most votes at the time. He was only about 24 when he first got elected. I think he ran and won maybe like three times? He's the one who brought here [Iris'] husband, because they were pretty good friends. . . . When the teachers got their raise, he said, "All you had to do was ask." Nobody had ever asked before.

We were disappointed because at one time the Superintendent here had told him, "G—, you are the best School Board member I have ever had to work with." He'd get mad sometimes because he'd suggest something and [the Superintendent] wouldn't go along with it or whatever, but his interests were always what's best for our kids and our teachers. That was my philosophy too. You know what is best for our teachers. . . . He was one of the best Superintendents, if not the best we've ever had here. He was always very fair, and if it was going to cost the school district money, . . . he wouldn't go along with it.

Michael: So why did you decide to run for the Board? How did that come about?

Glory: There were a lot of things that were going on that I thought maybe I could help with. I felt I could contribute something, being a teacher. Every time that my husband went on a workshop, he actually attended the meetings, and I attended with him. I learned a lot about the laws and everything that goes together with making it a good

school, and I thought I could contribute. He didn't want to run anymore, and I said, "Well, people have been asking me, 'why don't you run?' " They still ask me today. . . .

When you see these kids that don't have the opportunities that we were given, you've got to do something. I wanted to do something. Not only in academics, I believe very much in sports and what the extra-curricular activities do for you, because I've seen it. If that's motivation, then do it. When I was on the School Board, one of the things I brought up was the fact that we had girls' and boys' soccer teams but we didn't have it at the junior high. So they would start at a disadvantage. Unless they played out on the street, they didn't have that.

[I pushed for a pay bump for teachers with Master's degrees]. I brought it up, and I said, you know, "How many teachers do we have with their Master's degree?" They gave me the information. There were only 11. I said, "There's no incentive for teachers to go, but these 11, how much is it going to cost us? $11,000 to give them a $1,000 stipend? Let's do it." So we talked about it, and I was able to get everybody to agree, and we gave them. Those were, you know, couple other things that I remember that I pushed for.

Michael: So one last question to think about. Is it harder, or is there any difference, for a woman to run and serve in the community, than for a man?

Glory: Oh, definitely. Definitely. More people think that men are going to do a better job. I mean, look, there had never been a woman since F—. . . . And I don't know if anybody had run before me. I really don't, I can't tell you that. But some people didn't think that I should, I'm sure. Because I was a woman; "it's a job for a man." But

now, how many have we had since? Except for me and Iris. So, has there been anybody else?

(We walk through my research notes and her recollection, and land at a range of 4-6 women total since the inception of the school district.)

Glory: The majority is still definitely men. It's just something that I don't think gets talked about a lot.

Iris.

Iris was the other female board member who participated in this research. She lives across the street from the elementary school my boys' now attend. Her husband was, like Glory's, a long-time board member prior to Iris' service. In fact, Iris' husband passed away, and was memorialized when a new elementary school was named after him. Here is Iris' narrative:

> Okay. I was born in [a nearby city]. To a couple that was very, very poor. And, my parents had four children; one son and three daughters. So I grew up in a farm where my grandparents lived, and most of our aunts and uncles lived there too. . . . So eventually my parents were able to get out of poverty. My father was a truck driver. My mother was a homemaker. I learned how to make tortillas and rice and beans, I think I was maybe ten or eleven years old. . . . My mother was very strict. My dad was very strict. And he would get us up in the weekends. I mean, we didn't sleep late. We would get up and help with the chores and house work, washing and mopping floors and everything that needed to be done at the house.

I went to church. My parents were very Catholic. My grandparents were very Catholic. And I did my First Communion when I was six years old. Learned all my prayers and . . . was ready to make First Communion at six.

I entered school at the old Américo elementary building, which was just a couple of rooms. And I think we went there until about the fifth or sixth grade. . . . So when I was about, I would say about 12 or so, they had the Central Junior High. I went there. And, I was very young when I met my husband. I was 15 years old. And, we just, you know, hit it off. He was in high school, I was in junior high. I was in the seventh grade. So we just hit it off and eventually he dropped out of high school, my husband. And he went to work to support his family. . . .

And he was three years older than me. So I kept on and . . . 'till he says, "have you considered getting married?" And I go like, "No. Why?" He says, "Well I'm gonna ask you." And so he said, "I wanna' go to your parents' house and ask for your hand in marriage." So I told my parents and my dad said, "No. You're just too young." So we waited about 9 months . . . eventually eloped, and got married. And so we started our family. And my oldest daughter, Sonya, was born. And I stayed home with my child.

[I] eventually went to some GED classes and got my GED. And, I stayed home. I didn't work for quite some time. . . . He was in construction . . . with a very well-known gentleman here in Américo. His name was Mr. G—. He did some of the buildings in the school district. He was very well known, and a very good construction company he had. And did a lot of buildings around the Valley. So he was in construction, working. And like I said, I stayed home with my child. . . .

Anyway, when we moved here, everybody around us was white. Everybody. We were the only ones. And friends would ask my husband, "How did you do it to get into that neighborhood? How did you— Do you have money or what?" Well, then eventually, they (the Anglos?) sold. Eventually, they sold and they sold and everybody started selling. And some people say it's because we had moved into the neighborhood as Mexican-Americans. I don't know if you ever heard this but from the railroad tracks to the north, there was only Hispanics. From the railroad tracks to the south, there was only Anglos. I mean that railroad track was very, very real. And my children were even asked, "How did your dad get that house?"

"That house" is a small, unobtrusive wood frame home located directly across from the main entrance of the school my sons attend. I sometimes park right in front of Iris' house during the rush of traffic to pick students up. As Iris continues:

I had good neighbors. I had good neighbors. I mean, I'm not going to complain about that. It's just that you know, well they just couldn't see a family— my husband being a carpenter, basically, you know because that's what he did and me staying at home. But we were given the opportunity. And we were very blessed to have that opportunity. And so that was kind of like people would wonder like, "Well, she's on the other side of the road— of the railroad tracks." And eventually, it kind of like faded away and then people (the Anglos) started moving out and more people (the Hispanics) started buying houses here.

So, one day a friend asked my husband if he had considered getting into politics. And we just looked at each other and . . . well, no. We didn't know anything about

politics. You know? I had never. My parents had always voted and had already instructed us, register and vote. . . . But then, they came around. About '67, '68 and . . . asking me if he would accept a position in the school board. Okay? And, we talked about it. Not that I made a lot of difference, in his decision. But he considered it, and he was appointed to the Board at that time. . . .

[Glory's] husband was on the board then. . . . That was important, that they were friends. I think that they thought of him as a good man. Honest. Kept his word and his promises. I think that he made an impact in the community by that time, that was helping out people. And of course they wanted a Mexican-American. Okay? The Anglo part of the school board was kind of in control.

And so he was able to be appointed to the Board. And I'm not really sure if it was a year or maybe a couple of months or so when elections were going to be up. . . . And, basically, that time was not the elections that are going on right now. . . . Okay? You had, he and his friends making billboards. . . . They would buy a plywood, a thin, quarter-inch plywood, and make their signs, make their names, make their whatever they wanted on their signs. And here they were. Nights after work, cutting out with a jigsaw, all these letters for their four by eight signs. Maybe, 10, 15, no more than 20 signs went up, at that time. I mean, it was, just maybe, a couple of . . . on [one state highway] and maybe on [another state highway], one or two. . . . Not anything like you see today.

[The money] it came from their pockets. . . . Or maybe a friend that would donate a plywood or two. . . . That was basically it. Donations were very scarce. Very scarce. We would make chicken barbecues. We would make raffles. We would do any kind of

fundraiser that we could to get in . . . a couple of hundred dollars. And a hundred dollars is a lot then. It went a long way. And of course, election day comes, and . . . oh, they would use their bullhorns. Or had like, what do you call these things? You put on top of the car and you- . . . Go around . . . Yeah. A loudspeaker. And they would go around town a couple of weekends before the election. . . . [On] election day, . . . by then, you talk to a couple of volunteers, a couple of people that said, "Hey, what can I help you with?" and we would basically tell them, "Bring your friends, bring your relatives, try to get as many votes and encourage people to vote."

There was not much participation and it's sad because we want a change but yet, you know, people were scared. I think they were intimidated, I think that people said, "Well, if they see me there or they see me go, I don't know what can happen." So a lot of the jobs were from people that had farms. One particular individual that had the dairy product here, and I don't know if you read his obituary and it says something like that, but I'm not gonna' talk about that. And we had a lot of canning companies and then we had a plastic factory and so, I think people were scared to get out and vote.

So anyway, the election came, he was elected to the board and I think there was another person but I'm not too sure who was it. So here he is, going to school board meetings and trying to learn as much. . . . Very young. Most of the school board members were very young at that time except maybe one or two gentlemen that were older than them. But he's trying to learn all these things about the school board, he's trying to learn, you know, well, what goes on with the office, what goes on with the

cafeteria, what goes on with the janitors and then, you have people knocking on your door, "I need a job, what can you do for me?"

"Well, apply, you'll be considered like everybody else, I'm not promising you a job but you know, maybe, if there's a position available, you'll get in." And so, I think we ran . . . about two times he won, then he lost but very much involved, all the time. By then, he was already involved in county. In county politics and so, still working with the construction, tried to make it on his own but we didn't do it so he had to go back to a company. We struggled some, you know, I mean sometimes there were good times, sometimes there were bad times with financially, of course. And then he still had to have some kind of help for his mom because she had eight children, . . . there was three boys and five girls, then he had to help his mom. And so he kept on involved until he decided he wanted to run again, I think it was two years later and he won again. . . .

He and his friends at one time, and I'm talking about maybe the early '70s, decided to organize an organization that was called [APISD] Area Civic Organization. And we would make fundraisers when there was a funeral that families didn't have, we would help out when there was a person that had an illness, a long-term illness. We would help out with donations, so he— I mean there's a lot of good memories and he tried to do the best he could for his community and serve his community. . . .

More people were coming in and joining our club. We had monthly meetings, we had people come in. We would meet at different houses, we would make phone calls and say, "Hey, we're having a meeting, get yourself over here and hear what's going on in the city and the school, get informed so you can go back and tell friends and relatives

what's going on, programs that are coming in." Same thing with the city, "We need a street fixed, let's go to the city meeting." We'd delegate maybe two or three people to go, not the whole crowd, but just a couple of people to kind of voice what their concerns.

[About my sons' school across the street]. Oh I saw that school go up. My husband was the president of the board when that school went up. In fact, the fine arts [building] went up when he was in the board. Early childhood (another building) went up when he in the board. There was a lot of remodeling done at the high school, when he was on the board. And then, well, all the community schools went up when he was on the board because we basically had that one grade school in Américo, Central Middle School, and then the high school. Let me see, was that old gym up? Not really sure, but a lot of buildings went up while he was on the board. A lot of the buildings. . . .

He passed away in 2001. And that was in November. He was still in the school board. His illness was very short and he was still in the school board. In February, some of the board members wanted to know what was gonna' happen and I said, "You'll probably gonna' have to appoint somebody" and well, election came and my . . . you know, we wanted somebody in the family, maybe, to take over and actually my own sons and daughters asked to run. So by that time when I told, I think one or two of the board members, they said, "Well, why don't we go ahead and appoint you? And you can go ahead and start serving and then run." I think election then were in May. And so that's what happened, that's how I got on the board, too. I was appointed and then I ran and . . . [served] three terms. Until Mr. L— decided to run. And he had the majority so he won.

I didn't know a lot of things. I did not. [My husband] was not a person to come home and say, "Well this, and this and this and this happened." No. I mean, he kept it very business-like, very private, too. I mean, sometimes when we had our meetings for the [APISD] club, people would ask him, "Well, what did you all discuss, or did you come to a decision that you're going to pass this, or you voted it 'no.' " They wanted to know the "why's," you know. First as a wife, I really didn't ask a lot, you know. If I heard it— and sometimes I would hear it from other people before he even came home and tell me this happened, but, you know, I felt like: "Well, he knows what he's doing, I'm just going to stay out." But then when I got onto the board, it was like, "Oh my god, this is ...". I mean, I was overwhelmed at the beginning.

Maybe if I had known some of the things, you know, and decisions that have to be made, I would've had very serious thoughts about not serving. It's like, "Oh my god, we have to do this when we had to get rid of the— the RIF?" That was a thing that I— I lost about three or four nights of sleep because I knew this was going to happen and I felt like: "Oh my god, I'm going to do this. I'm going" . . . Because you were told you have to do it. And it was very, very hard. You know, you go to this board meeting, faced with all these people, but yet your hands are tied. Here I am making this drastic change in so many families. . . . What we have always done, is help instead of, and I felt like I was going to hurt, that I was going to make such an impact. That I was making this decision that, my god, how could I do this? That's against everything I believe. And so, it was very, very hard. I never, never thought that seven people could decide the difference in

the lives that we were going to touch. Thinking about ladies, men, even people in the office that have to be RIF-ted.

Certainly there was bad pressure. . . . The superintendent had said, "I'm not going to give you any names, for a while." . . . I think we got the names the day of the meeting and people were coming, "Hey am I on the list?" I don't know if you are on the list because I haven't seen any list. "Am I going to get *rifted*? Am I going to lose my job? Is my wife going to lose my job? Is my son or my daughter?" I don't know because I don't know any names. All I know is that certain people from certain departments from certain areas are going to have to be cut, but I can't tell you if you're there, or your son, or your mom, or any family members is there.

I lost so much sleep. It bothered me like big, big time. I was eating sometimes and I would say, oh my god, is this family going to have something eat next month? Because, it made so much difference. Of course, nobody is going to die from hunger here because you have so much help but it was a very, very tough decision that had to be made and there were others too. There were other decisions that had to be made that I felt like, what am I doing here? Why am I here doing this? Is it for the good of the community? Is it for the good of the school? Is it because these people are pressuring you to do something you don't want to?

I don't know if my husband ever made a decision that big that had impacted so many people. Like I tell you, he wasn't a person to come home and tell me, "Well, we had to do this." I don't know if they fired anybody or not even if they hired anybody until somebody would say, "He got a job at the school." How did you get that job? Well, there

was an opening for a custodian and he got a job. Oh, that's nice. Okay. But, he would never come and tell me anything. So, I feel like when I was there, it kind of like, oh my god, this is awful. This is not right. Why? And, a lot of times I asked another board member or maybe two, "This has to be done?" Yeah, it has to be done.

So, it really was an experience. An experience that you would think, are my kids safe after I do this. That serious. Are my kids going to be okay? Are my family going— Am I going to be okay? Especially after I lost my husband. I lived here, in this house, 14 years by myself. So, I'd come home, lock my doors and hopefully be safe for the night, but, you know. Even some of the relative and friends would say, aren't you afraid at night, here? Lots of people were very angry and I don't blame them, you know. It's something very common for a human being to be. I mean, you treat me this way, why should I not like you? There was a lot of *comebacks* that said, "Well, you know, you had to do it." Some people, maybe ten percent, twenty percent understood but the other eighty didn't. Especially if they didn't know . . . why it happened. So, yes, it was very hard and it made you think. I'm sure lots of things went through these people's minds as to, I didn't do anything wrong. I tried to do my job. I tried to do good and I'm being treated this way. It's not fair. . . .

I didn't have the majority on the board for quite some time, so my voice was— huh [gestures dismissively]— like I hadn't talked. . . . When this was going on. I think that in the three terms that I was there, I just had one term that we really had the majority and that's when Glory and I were on the board. I think when I was appointed, we had the majority. . . . But it was very difficult, very difficult. It's just like sitting there but not

having a voice. They would hide from me. They would not tell me a lot of things. Eventually we would find out. When you went back for agendas and following what we had discussed and stuff, this happened. But, a lot of the stuff, they kept it themselves. Until somebody is on a city commission or a school board, you really don't . . . know how important these positions are. . . . It's not a job because you don't get paid. It's an obligation, basically. I feel like if you cannot fulfill that obligation to the best of your ability, don't even consider running for a post or for a position because to me it was very serious. I took it as a serious commitment.

And so that's been the politics, you know, how he came to serve and how I came to serve. But we're always involved, he was always involved in politics, he was very good friends to governor Anne Richards and of course very good friends to the county judge, Ramon Garcia right now and many many friends. He worked for the last seventeen years, he worked for the Texas Department of Agriculture and Rick Perry was one of the commissioners and we're very good friends with— I mean, we know we are Democrats, we've been Democrats for many, many years. You know, generations back. But when there's a good man, there's a good man on the other side and so he recognized that and they gave him credit for that. And so he went fast, very young, expecting to retire soon but you know, God had other plans and so that's what happened with . . . then he passed away. But he enjoyed, he enjoyed serving the community.

I have two sons, and three daughters. My . . . second daughter, her husband was . . . police chief, I mean, he was involved in politics a lot. My oldest daughter, she lived in [nearby city] most of her married life. [It is] a political town, but not much like the

[APISD] area. My youngest daughter and her husband, they all go to vote, but basically have not been involved until about three or four years ago. My oldest son, he goes to vote, comes home, and does nothing. My youngest, he's more into it. He likes it. He was planning on running for Mayor here in Paredes, and I said, "Hold up, let's talk about it. You have two little girls that need your attention. Eight years old, third graders, it's not a good time." [He said] "Why?" [I said] "Because, you think it doesn't take time away from your family? It takes a lotta' time from your family? What would you ask your dad, when he was going to meetings? "What time are you coming? You have another meeting, dad? Really? I have a game."

It takes a lot of your time from your family. . . . It's not as easy as people think, so I said, "Let's talk about it." I don't think he's running. I hope not. I'm not encouraging him, because politics can be dirty, can be ugly, can sometimes even ruin your life. Temptation is there. . . . I don't think it's the right time, right now. Maybe later on, but not now.

I mean, they've been involved. As children, we would take them to our *pachangas*, to our barbecues. My youngest, well he was the one that really— He knew everybody that was running. Gave advice sometimes, too, to his dad, and to his friends. He's . . . on the phone, "What? You did this? You did that?" with other members of his family that are on that school board. But he likes it. That's the one, I think, that is really gonna' get involved later on. He's one of them.

Humberto.

Humberto was referred to me by Roberto as a student leader of the 1968 student walkout. He is a veteran who served in Vietnam, and continues to work for veterans, as a county veterans' representative. Our interview was conducted at an office for veterans, and was cut short. Due to recent health concerns, it was difficult to reschedule, and I did not wish to press the issue in the short term. I appreciate and honors those words we were able to share:

> I graduated in '69, in the spring of '69, May. I was born there in Paredes, actually. Come full circle. I was born in the place that gives birth to people, I don't mind you recording this, it's a clinic. And the doctor is called Dr. D— and now it's a funeral home! A place that gave birth, life okay, and now it's a place where your remains are at.
>
> I was born there. I went to school there, grew up there. You're familiar with where Kennedy Elementary is at? Okay, there's a four-stop intersection there. There's this old store there, L— R—'s Store.
>
> It was Paredes Elementary. It wasn't Kennedy when I was there, it was just called Paredes Elementary. We were there until the fourth grade and then fifth grade we transferred to the Central Intermediate . . . . You know, I always wondered about that. Well, when you're a kid you just don't think about these things. I like to think that I did well in school, and those of us that did well in school got good grades and all, . . . I always thought the Central Intermediate was where the smarter kids were at, okay? And I had this stigma about not being there, but I couldn't understand why. My neighbors and some guys in the neighborhood that— I don't want to say that they weren't that smart, but they weren't getting the grades that I would get.

And then, when I got to the fifth grade, that's the first time I saw gringos, okay? I said, "Whoa!" I mean that's the first time. I remember staring at them because I really had never interacted with *gringos*. At Paredes Elementary? Not one *gringo*, okay? Just the teachers. No offense, of course. I realized, you know, that there was another world out there.

The only time that we would see *gringos* was when we would go to— There was three theaters in Elsa. There was *El Alameda*, which is now our VFW headquarters. And then there's the Power Church that was *El Roxy*, if I'm not mistaken, and then the Tropic. It was right across from the street from the old H-E-B (Texas grocery chain). As a matter of fact, that's where the pharmacy's at now, next to G—'s Flower Shop. That's where just the white folk, the Anglos, would go (the Tropic). And there was a balcony, like all theaters had. There was a balcony there and that's where those of us Mexican Americans would be, were allowed to sit. We didn't think anything of it.

But later I come to realize that, especially when I was in the fifth grade, that I was actually getting better grades than the Anglos. And then, in the sixth grade, that's when then begin tracking us, okay? I didn't know that then. They put me in the class where the Anglos were, I guess, just as smart as I was. So, we became good friends.

And, my other friends that had been in Central Intermediate, where I was in Paredes, they were tracked into [a group] with the kids that weren't getting as good grades as we were. So, thereafter we transferred to the junior high, the old high school there right by, off [the state highway]. And then they had [class groups] 7-1, 7-2, 7-3, 7-

4. 7-1 was where the brightest kids were at. Right? And that is where I was at. And then 8-1, 8-2, eighth grade, same thing.

Michael: I taught in 8-1! [laughter]

Humberto: And that's the way it went all the way up until we got to freshman year. By that time of course you have your electives and your course work, what do you call them, mandatory classes you gotta take. And I always did pretty good with the exact sciences and everything. I liked that. Matter of fact, my junior year I made up my mind I was going to be an electrical engineer. Had no idea what that was really, but it sounded good. . . . And taking Chemistry, you know, Physics at the high school, . . . Trigonometry. I liked, enjoyed that.

But by the summer of our, the summer before our senior year, there was a lot of changes back then. There was riots in the streets. The Black movement up in Detroit. Watts, actually started in Watts, California, Los Angeles. And in Detroit and all over the country people were revolting against a government that was very oppressive from what I heard. Okay?

Now remember I'm still in high school. And this began in '66. Okay, I was, '66, '67, '68, I was a sophomore in high school, the summer before my sophomore year. So we would go up on the migrant trail and drive through these cities and there were times when we would see the smoke billowing on the horizon. And then we actually had to reroute because there were riots, and there was protesting and demonstrations on the highway that we would take going through town. There were no freeways.

So that's the first time I saw, got an inkling as to democracy at work, if you want to. I had no idea what that was. But people were expressing their views, freedom of constitutional right to expression. Okay? First amendment. And then we'd come back. As a matter of fact when I was on the migrant trail, that was the first time I saw a Black person, up North.

I said, "Wow. That's another world." And I kind of realized that it was a big world out there from what I was used to because we didn't leave our neighborhood, our *barrio*, as children. No mass transit, no public transit, transportation system. So our life was just going to school and coming back, going to school and going back, and that was it until we became migrants. Okay?

And growing up I also picked cotton. You know, we went out there and hoed and [pulled] the weeds and all for farmers. That's the only relationship that I had with someone other than Spanish surname people. But we always dealt with the *troqueros*, the contractor. The people that would pick us up and take us home from the fields. And we never really saw the farmer, the owner of the property that we were working on, the fields that we were working on.

I remember my seventh grade, I remember hearing about this place, Vietnam. Okay? Called Vietnam. And mama would come home. Walter Cronkite was in the news and saying that 17 airborne soldiers from Camp Eagle, the 101st Airborne, were killed in [an] attack. And they just kept going every year, every year, until there was a draft.

D— (namesake for an APISD school) was my was cousin. We were same age, maybe one month difference. I was older than he was. He was killed in Vietnam. He dropped out of school the summer before our senior year. As migrants, we were up in Ohio. He wanted to join the Marine Corp. He said, "Humberto lets you and I join the Marine Corp." I said, "Nah, man, you're nuts! We have just one more year, our senior year coming up. Why don't we just graduate and we'll both volunteer?" I wanted to volunteer as well. I knew I was going to be in the military, gonna be in the army. Like my dad, a World War II veteran.

So, we came home from Ohio, off the migrant trail, and those Y—, they lived next door to us, came home and D— wasn't with them. When I asked the girls, his sisters, "Where's David?" They said, "Well, him and P—" his first cousin, older than us by three years "they both volunteered for the Army." [I said,] "But he's not old enough!" They said, "Well, he kept badgering Dad and so Dad signed for him." Allowed him to go in at 17. Well, he went in September of '68 and was killed in April of '69, just a few months after.

Michael: Before you even graduated.

Humberto: Yeah, I didn't graduate.

Per capita, I think that we're over-represented in the number of veterans in the community, compared to other communities.

[In high school] I would walk, I remember myself and another friend of mine we were walking along the sidewalk after football practice and this car pulled over. And some friends of mine that had graduated the year previous, I knew these guys.

They said Humberto we'll give you a ride home. There's something we want to talk to you about. And, so we did. And we got in the car. These guys were from Crystal City. There was a couple other guys in the car from Crystal City. One of them was José Angel Gutiérrez and the other was Narciso Aleman. And they said that they wanted to visit with me some more. They had long hair. They had something to propose to me that I might be interested in. And they wanted to talk to some of the so-called leaders in the school. And I said okay. . . .

And the next day there was another one of my classmates, V—from [East Town]. V— and I were [on] student council our senior year. Both of us were. I had been the junior class president. Played football, baseball, you know, the works. . . .

Then one day we were just cruising around and [our friends] said, "Felix there's some people, you met them yesterday. Why don't we go and visit with them some more." And I said, "Yeah, okay." There was an old church. An old white church. And there was a belfry upstairs, like a little office area. And that's where we met. And there was some tables and chairs. And then these guys were there and they asked me some questions like, "What is it that I want to do? Did you already register for the draft?"

I said, "Yes, I have." And they said, "You know what? That's not our war. We don't belong there. Yeah, we're fighting the rich man's war. It's a military industrial complex war. And we're killing people that have no way of defending themselves, actually. And the people that are actually being killed are the civilians. Okay? And the other thing was that those people over there defending their country, we're going over

there. So, yeah, how would like it if somebody invaded us like they did Pearl Harbor." Okay? We didn't like that too much.

So, it made sense to me. I said, "You know, well, my father's a World War II veteran and I'm gonna be just like my dad. My country calls." [They said], "Yeah, but there are moral issues to consider here. Okay? As well, World War II it was clear cut. Good against evil. Okay? And there was no gray area. Okay? You either win or we're going to be speaking different languages. Okay? Either Japanese or German."

They said, "Don't you see that for us it's a war of aggression and we have all these toys made by the Department of Defense and all these private contractors. Lockheed Martin and Martin Marietta and all these others that make these weapons and bombs and stuff like this. And what do you want to do with all these toys? And you can't play with them. Okay? So you create a felt need for that. So, let's throw a war."

Well, you know, you come home. I began to see things in a different light. My senior year you come home and especially because now we are eighteen. And the war is not over. There was a score being kept, actually. Walter Cronkite and Brinkley, they were all over the news. [Saying], "To date we have had 15,000 of our soldiers killed in Vietnam. But we've been killing over 35,000 of them." Okay? Every day there's a score. And there's the 5th infantry division engaged the whatever regiment of the North Vietnamese army. Especially in '68, in the fall of '68, the Tet of '68; New Years in Vietnam. That was the time. Because the New Year was coming in. Everybody celebrates the New Year. There was gonna be a cease fire. Okay?

So, we agreed to it and it turned out to be a ruse. And they infiltrated during that time. That is when they attacked. That was the famous Tet Offensive, 1968. It was deadly for us. And so we had that. So that Tet of '68 carried through the spring of '68, Summer '68, the Fall of '68, my senior year.

And then the cities are burning. You had the Black Panther movement. And then you had the Symbionese Liberation Army. Those radicals, you know, White radicals where they're underground. Okay? Again, some White radicals that were overthrowing the government, actually. It was a violent overthrow of the government.

Michael: There was a lot of bombings of government buildings and stuff.

Humberto: There was a lot of bombings. Oh, yes. Government buildings. Selective Service board buildings and courthouses and legislatures, . . . the capitol buildings. I mean a lot of bombings. These were home grown groups. Okay? And there's the Puerto Rican liberation movement. They bombed Congress. They bombed Congress. They didn't want to be a colony anymore. Because they are a colony like Guam and the Virgin Islands, properties of the U.S. And they're not a state. They're territories.

Anyway, so this is what's going on in the news. You see this all the time. We were growing up during that time. And you had Reies Lopez Tijerina and Tierra Amarilla, the siege of Tierra Amarilla in Mexico, Arizona. Okay? He actually went in, his group went in and arrested the Sheriff and all these other people at the courthouse and locked them up because they were protesting the take-over of their lands that had been there since the Spanish land grants.

These land grants, or *porciones*, carry a storied history. The earliest grants were issued by the Spanish crown, then honored by an independent Mexican state, and promises were issued by the Republic of Texas. But between Texas' independence (1836) and just after the conclusion of the Mexican-American war (1848), there are numerous stories of stolen land, bloodshed, and forced changes in ownership, including of valuable mineral rights. As Humberto continues:

> Like my family at the King Ranch. You drive from Raymondville, North and you get to the (border patrol) *checkpoint*, between the checkpoint in Sarita close to the rest area, there's a road that takes you East and West. . . . And to the right it takes you out to the bay. That's La Parra Rd., Rancho la Parra Rd. That was our property. That belonged to my family on my mother's side, de la Garza. The Spanish land grant had been granted to the [family]. We're in court, right now, as a matter of fact, for the royalties.
>
> So, we already knew of some of the history there. The Texas Rangers. You had the onion strikes here in United Farm Workers Unions, Cesar Chavez and Reies Lopez Tijerina. He proposed, he advocated for violent overthrow and takeover of property that were ours to begin with. And I was aligned more with his philosophy of doing things. Okay? Social reform. Well, this guy, he arrested all these people, locked them up in the courthouse. Guess who they sent. The Governor decided enough was enough. They'd had enough of this guy. So guess who they sent, who was the commanding general of the National Guard there? General John J. Pershing, Jr., okay? Just like his dad . . . had followed Pancho Villa and captured him, and all this shit. Well, "we're going to quell these Mexicans one more time. We're gonna send his son General John J. Pershing, Jr.."

Well, with Reies Lopez Tijerina there's a little difference in that some of his followers were Vietnam veterans already. And most of us that were in Vietnam we were infantry. So, we were familiar with tactics and we knew how to use weapons. Okay? And we would use them. So, all kinds of shit went down.

Well, anyway, we would meet about three times, sometimes four times a week at that church. And then there was one time that I remember being up there and there was people that I did not recognize. And there was about maybe ten people there more that I did not recognize. One of them that was there was from Nicaragua. And there was a couple of Black guys and they were wearing berets, black berets. And there was a couple of other Chicanos and they were wearing brown berets. And then there was one Puerto Rican and a couple of White guys. A White guy and a girl.

They had long hair. They must have been an average of 23, 25, 26 years old. They were talking about violent overthrowing, that we need to do this. We need to overthrow the government, the government needs to wake up, the people need to wake up. We can't be doing what we're doing overseas, policing the world. When talking about democracy in other countries, to other countries, and patronizing them, could be in using condescending attitudes, when we have all this racism and discrimination here at home. All these barriers to voting. Back then they had the poll tax, and then all kinds of barriers. DPS troopers, you're going to be a DPS trooper, you had to be so tall. You know, six foot, something like that. Well, that leaves me out. They had all these laws and regulations that hindered our development. Our participation in the democracy.

Well, these guys had recruited me and Virginia Aleman. They began to make sense, actually they made sense. Thing is, how many Spanish-surname people do you see in the history books? How many Spanish-surname people do you see representing us in Congress, or in the state legislature? Here it is, Texas, actually "*Tejas*" is the proper pronunciation. *Tejas*, here, we seceded how many . . . When do you hear that there was a De La Garza, and all these other Spanish-surname people, at the Alamo as well? The original *Tejanos*. We are the original *Tejanos*. Sam Houston, Stephen Austin, Davy Crockett and all these people, they were illegal aliens. They came here. As a matter of fact, for them to live here they had to swear allegiance and become Mexican citizens. We did not know this. Information we did not know.

It began to make sense. Where do we play football? When do we have a football program? How many of us that are 5'6", 5'5", 5'8", how many of us are going to go onto college on a football scholarship? How many of us, if we get to college on a football scholarship, are going to make it to the pros in football? No. We should have programs that we can participate in and excel at. That perhaps would give us a future, if that's what we so choose. If not at academics. It made sense. Made sense to me.

Things were moving rapidly, and then the word got out that there were some rumors and rumblings in the community of a movement, where the 'natives' are restless. Word got out in the school that this was a movement that was starting within the student body. I was approached by the principal, Mr. P—, at the time. He said, "Humberto, I hear that there are some rumblings, some dissatisfied students, and that talking about some really dreadful thoughts. That perhaps there may be a walkout or that there are

demonstrations, and your name keeps popping up." I said, "Well, this is what school is for." I said, "I understand it's a venue for exchange of thoughts, and philosophies, and discussions on the issues. At least, that's what I understand."

I was actually receiving an education, which is what was missing in our school system. We were being lied to. Our history books were a big lie. Our civics books, whatever the government- we had then- books, were a lie. We were an invisible minority. We were nowhere in the history books. Yet my father is a World War II veteran. A decorated veteran. Every man his age in the neighborhood went to the war, World War II. Yet, we're nowhere to be . . . No Spanish-surname heroes. Only Audie Murphy, and the names that you would see on TV and in movies. No Spanish-surname heroes. What role models did we have? All of us wanted to be White, growing up. We wanted to be the cowboys, not the Indians.

He came to the house one day and wanted to talk with me about it because he had heard that there was some rumblings again, some really dissatisfaction in the community, and that it did not bode well. That there were going to be some protests and demonstrations like there were in the other cities in the country. This is what they feared.

I have not been doing well for about three months. I was out on FMLA and then the sick leave pool. I had rotator cuff surgery in my right shoulder, from Vietnam. And that was just ten minutes. Long story short, I guess I picked up a bug while I was in that surgery room, that operating room. Two days, three days later I came down with cellulitis in my left ankle. That put me in the hospital for five days. IV antibiotics.

When I was out, after the infection was gone, I couldn't walk. It was still painful, still swollen. (Humberto was unavailable for follow-up conversations due to health concerns)

Bob.

"Bob" is a White former classmate of APISD Board Members. He is also the son in law of a late, long-time Américo mayor- and one-time school board member (1954). His nephew R—also served as Mayor, and now serves on the APISD school board (2016). As Mayor, his nephew appointed me to serve on the Américo Housing Authority Board (2009-2011). Bob passed away shortly after our interview, which was interrupted multiple times so he could address the side effects of his treatment and health condition.

We met in his house. To get there, you turn right off one of the three main roads—state highways—intersecting APISD. He lived in Paredes, and turning off the main road beside a prominent pawn shop, you come upon a long lane, which seems to have once 'put on airs,' a grassy median running most of the length of the street, lined with old palms. The house was obscured by overgrown bushes and small flowering trees; there was a small seating area in the front, but I entered through the garage, which looked to double as an outdoor workspace for projects, chock-full but fairly organized. When I entered, I was struck at once by how dark and cluttered the interior appeared, even while evidence of a—perhaps 1970s era chic—still persisted. Persisted in the ornamental detail in the wood trim of the kitchen cabinets, the green formica countertops, and faded decorative wallpaper. I think I was struck by this scene because it spoke of silent, gradual decay, which stood in contrast to dozens of (or countless?) encounters with Bob at *coffee* in Paredes. There he struck me always as forceful, opinionated, sarcastic, and early on quick to take offense, but in later years more subdued and good humored.

In this conversation, he spoke in his typically direct way, methodically pacing his words, and showing a twinkle in his eye when he spoke in particular about the history of Américo. Bob started our conversation by sharing his understanding of the origins of APISD as a school district:

> Okay, they built the original high school building that's still there and still being used around the mid-thirties. I'm not sure exactly what year. I want to say it seems that people before me, before my time even, talked about, who have been good friends of mine over the years, talked about being members of the first graduating class. Mr. D— was one of them. I think Mr. N— who just recently passed away was one of the early classes, not necessarily the original graduating class. Mr. O— is the only one that I can recall for sure that was the original first senior class.
>
> And he passed away, let's see, only a year or two ago. A couple of years maybe now. I don't know of anybody else, still living that was a member of that first class. But in my time, of course I was born in 1941. Then incidentally, I was born within more or less a mile of where we sit at this minute. I've been a member of this community all my life except for the time I was away in the service in the army and a few times temporarily for a few months at a time working somewhere else, South Dakota one time and Mississippi couple of times. Other than that, I've been right here. Lived here, worked here, married a local girl, her father was the mayor of [Américo] for many, many years.
>
> Oh yeah, oh yeah. [Other family members] were strongly involved in local politics, particularly the Américo area. Like school boards, city offices and so forth. And they were very, very fine people. Highly respected and they always supported my

father-in-law, J—. And they really thought the world of him as did many Mexican-American people in the community. One of the main reasons is because he spoke fluent Spanish. Very, very fluent Spanish. And they really, really liked and respected him for that because he could communicate with them so well.

Nobody seems to know [what happened to original, framed photos of early APISD graduating classes]; somebody does but they ain't saying, whatever happened. They had pictures in that old high school building. I remember 'em very, very well. Up on the walls up above the windows, from the first graduating class, every single class all the way through the time I was and after my time in high school. And all of a sudden, in later years those pictures just disappeared and nobody wants to admit that they know anything at all about whatever happened to 'em. . . .

It's just a crying shame that those disappeared because they were a real treasure, real treasure. Everybody that ever remembers them hanging up there would sigh. I remember very well, walking along the hallway and looking at 'em.

Américo was one of the few towns in the Valley that was served by two separate railroads. There was the Southern Pacific and the Missouri Pacific. One of them, the tracks ran east and west, the other one ran north and south. Right through the heart of Américo. And the reason for that was there were so many produce sheds in Américo that during the season, the vegetable packing season, there was a lot of produce shipped out of Américo. . . . Each railroad had it's own ice house that serviced only their cars. That was back before refrigerated cars. And they had to ice 'em down in order to ship. And they

wouldn't even make it all the way. They would have to stop somewhere en route . . . and re-ice to keep the produce fresh.

Michael: It's crazy to think, just back then the people who were in New York City who were enjoying their produce were getting it all the way from the Rio Grande Valley.

Bob: Right, well we were the winter garden. We could produce all year long here. And not too many places could do that.

At one time in the heyday there was 16 different packing shed operations in Américo alone. Some was small admittedly, but there was 16 different entities packing vegetables and fruits and everything, shipping out of Américo, just out of Américo.

Now you were asking, before I had to get up, about my family and what originally brought them to the Valley. I guess I would have to say the depression, the Great Depression, because they all were living in a little town called String Town, Oklahoma. They were a family of means, to some extent, one of my aunts had married a gentleman that owned a big hardware store, there in String Town. He also owned a lot of properties, houses and hotels, several things. Anyway, that's how they originally came to String Town, Oklahoma.

But one of my aunts was the Postmaster, in String Town; another one pretty much ran the hotel. Then my aunt, Mary Francis, Aunt Fanny we called her, worked a lot in the hardware store, which were her husband's store. Aunt Ella was the telephone operator; she ran the telephone office. So they were pretty much central to the little town. But they had, there was a small bank there, and they were good friends with the family that, I think the gentleman if I'm not mistaken, I remember his son, I don't remember the

gentleman, at the time that he was either President of the Bank, or the Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the bank.

Anyway, they were good friends, and they began to get a little wind of trouble coming. So they went and talked to him, because he was a personal friend, and ask him about pulling their money out. He [said], "Oh no, everything will be alright, don't worry, just leave it alone." Well next thing they knew it was too late. They did get some out, but a fraction of what they had in there.

Michael: It's just crazy, the bank just says, "We've lost all the money."

Bob: Oh yeah.

Michael: Bank shuts. Gone.

Bob: Gone, just gone, turn around, it's gone. . . . My mother and father, they came here first in 1924, and they bought a 10 acre property on Mile 15 and a half, just south of Américo. They moved there, built a home, and my grandfather as long as he was able he farmed that land. Later rented it out to another farmer, when he was no longer able to do it himself. But anyway, and I lived, my mother and I lived there next to them, in a little house on that same property. While I was going to school, here at APISD. My mother worked in the school cafeteria as a matter of fact.

Yeah, now she should be in there (the yearbook), depending on which annual, because they, I remember seeing the picture [of] the cafeteria staff in there. Anyway, like I say, Grandmother L— and Grandpa L— came first, and I guess they talked to the [one] side of the family. My mother and father were already married then in Oklahoma. So they all migrated down here.

[The family] owned [the property on Mile 15] for several years and finally lost it to taxes, which happened to a lot of people back then. Lots of properties were lost to tax. Right after the Depression and it was hard, hard to make a living, make money.

You could make enough to live because you could produce your own pork, and eggs, milk, and certain vegetables and everything like to subsist. They did, they knew how to do all that, and they did very well at it. But anyway, there was no money, so without money they couldn't pay the taxes and the government wound up taking it over.

Michael: So I guess given the scale and the severity of the Depression, which is something I think hard for people my age to understand.

Bob: And even me, yeah.

Michael: Yeah, to see this kind of explosion of produce growth, 16 packing sheds, two railways, that must seem like very exciting opportunity by comparison.

Bob: Yeah, now that would have been the era of World War II, and that's where there was such a strong, strong demand for produce, and anything like that agricultural products. That's what spurred the growth in the produce industry here in the Valley, really. The whole Valley, not just Américo. Américo was a big player, but, and then cotton gins, there was a good bit of cotton growing around the area, several gins, gin operations.

Michael: So I hadn't thought about the effect of World War II, the war demand.

Bob: Oh yeah, that was what really got it up and going. Prior to that it was very sluggish.

Michael: Then, and definitely also additionally some gins, I think the Superintendent for a while, P—, I think ...

Bob: Oh yeah, Mr. P—. . . . His mother and father had, let's see, at least . . . three gins, one at [nearby town], one at Américo, no excuse me, [East Town], and then one out at what we refer to as [nearby town]. They had three gins, and later on Mr. P— . . . took those all over from his father, and ran them.

Oh yes, my mother worked, one of my early recollections as a little boy, she had what was back then considered a pretty good job, in the Engleman Garden packing shed. . . . Out there during the week they had those small cottages I guess you'd call them, for the employees to live. I think they had to pay rent but it wasn't a lot. Engleman had its own store, had a lot of stuff there.

She lived there during the week, in one of those little cottages, and my Uncle J—, lot of times I'd go with him, on the weekend she would have off, like Saturday and Sunday. We would go out there in his old Model A Ford, pick her up, bring her back down to [a nearby city], and she'd spend the weekend until she had to go back Sunday afternoon, then he would take her back out there to work during the week.

Michael: What was she doing specifically?

Bob: Packing fruit. . . . Yeah, oranges and grapefruit. I don't remember that they handled vegetables in that shed, I think it was strictly a fruit shed. But it had its own railroad spur, serving just that Engleman Garden shed. It was big, it was a big outfit. They shipped lots and lots of fresh fruit out of there.

Michael: So this kind of explosive growth and then at some point you went from [nearby city] to moving back in this town?

Bob: Yes, when I started school. My mother wanted [to], for whatever reason, I'm not exactly sure. Well, part of it was that my grandfather and grandmother were getting old and they needed somebody to kind of help take care of them. That was one of the reasons. So, my Grandmother L— bought a small wood frame house, moved it onto the property there, and my mother and I moved out there. She wanted me to go to school at APISD. Besides needing to be closer to her mother and father, so that's how we wound up coming back.

Michael: Now, the way you say APISD in that sense it sounds like it was a good school, or an aspirational thing to go put yourself in the district and go to school.

Bob: Oh, yes.

Michael: Were there fewer districts around, or why was that so special? Why was that a big deal?

Bob: There were fewer districts, I believe, at that time. At the time I started the school would've been '47, I believe. I think my first grade year was 1947 . . . . I don't really remember at that time whether or not [East Town] even had an elementary school or [North Town], for that matter. They may or may not have. But there were not as many districts as there are now, that's right, and they were much smaller. APISD was a relatively small district. Maybe not area-wise, but in population and numbers of students, it was a small district. Even when I was in high school, we were double 'A' (AA) district.

Michael: The ‘47 annual (yearbook) had 14 faculty, and the senior class was 20 students.

Bob: That was 1947?

Michael: (affirmative) ’47 annual. So … small, certainly small. Did you find that it was rare to go to school, or was it common to go to school? How common was it for kids to be enrolled in school and certainly be enrolled all the way through high school?

Bob: It was very common back then. Now, the Mexican American children versus the Anglo children in many cases they didn’t go through with graduation. But they had, and I don’t specifically remember the school, but I know of it and know where it was located. There was a school they called *El Diablo*. You’ve probably heard that name in Américo. And it was somewhere just north of the Catholic church and Américo right now. And that was a small district, and it was for the Mexican American students that spoke no English, that’s all it was for. It was to teach them English so that they could merge with the mainstream classes later on. I think, if I’m not mistaken, most of ‘em moved from there to the mainstream in about the third grade. I believe that’s right. Second or third grade, something like that.

By then, they’d taught ‘em enough English that could function in the regular environment, which was all taught in English at that time. As many of them didn’t go ahead and stay all through graduation because of, you know, poor people, and families needed help and they would drop out. Some of ‘em migrated, even back then, migrated up north or to West Texas during the season for subsistence reasons. And their kids would go with them, naturally, and so a lot of ‘em didn't actually finish high school. But

a lot did too. By the time I was a senior, my senior year, I'd say probably the majority of the Mexican American students finished. The ones that started school graduated from the high school. One's right down the street, R—.

Michael: Yeah, there's so much there. But you're saying there was basically a change, even from when you entered school to when you graduated (1947-1960)?

Bob: Yeah, there were a lot of changes as a matter of fact. That was in reference to what we were discussing. Those who, of the Mexican American families, actually stayed from beginning to graduation. . . .

Actually, I personally did not graduate with my senior class. I left school the second semester of that year, before graduation.

Michael: And why?

Bob: I didn't like school. I had a disagreement with one of the teachers and I would not back down. I refused to back down, and he insisted that he caught me and my friends in a punishable offense and I would not stand for it. So, I wound up leaving.

Michael: So that one teacher and that one conflict . . . My brother went through almost the exact same story, and I haven't dug in too deep on that, but second semester of his senior year he gets upsets and has a conflict with a single teacher and then he later ended up getting his GED.

Bob: I did too. A couple of years after that, I went down to Southmost College. Had to go down there at that time to take your GED test. I took the test and, believe it or not, I did very well on the test.

Michael: Well, I think back then, it was much more common to not even . . . I mean, I think degrees weren't the same kind of hierarchy that they have today?

Bob: Oh, no. No, back in those days basically to the best of my knowledge a GED was as good as a regular high school diploma. You know?

Well, the first need for the GED, in my case, was when I was gonna enlist in the U.S. Army. In order to the guaranteed enlistment for training schools that I wanted I had to have a high school diploma or a GED. Either one, it didn't make any difference which. So that's when I went and got my GED so that I could qualify for aviation maintenance school, which that's what I wanted to do at the time.

Michael: (returns to race equity, after some reflection) When I'm thinking about '47, and you had talked about *El Diablo*, the way that I've heard it described was that there was almost like a 1L and a 1H, like a low and a high. Like first grade was divided so that if you spoke Spanish, I think they put you in the lower level until you progressed or something like that? (member checking)

Bob: Not when I started. No, it was not. There was only one first grade at what we still refer to as the *red brick school* in Américo. Mrs. J— was our teacher, and there was one first grade, one second grade, one third grade, one fourth grade, one fifth, and one sixth. There was no low or high, at that time. Maybe somewhere, later on, there may have been, but I'm not aware of it. It could have happened later on, but not at the time I started school. . . . Trying to think ahead all the way even through high school, I don't remember necessarily that there was a low and a high group. I don't remember it.

Michael: Trying to just get a sense for that ‘47 time period, or as you started in school, there was [an old blue law] that was established when I came into town, they created a division between north and south of the train tracks. Was that something you were familiar with, or what do you—

Bob: Well, it’s something that we may have known there was little bit of a difference, but it wasn’t strictly north and south, at least not in the case of Américo. Because there was Anglo neighborhoods on both sides of the railroads, both north and south. Mostly the Mexican-American people in Américo, they lived in town at that time, which weren’t all that many really, did live north of [the main east / west state highway]. But generally speaking, between [the state highway] and the railroad and I think there was a couple of small neighborhoods north of the railroad that were almost exclusively Mexican-American neighborhoods at that time. But we never thought anything about it, you know. I mean, we meaning, my group we never thought anything about it.

P—, little Pedro, used to be one of the greatest football stars APISD ever saw. He and I were in the same class, and we were very, very good friends from first grade on. His father owned a grocery store just north of the *red brick school*. We used to cross [the east/west highway] and they lived right across the street. The house is still there, nice big two story house that was the [family] place back then. P— and I used to go after school, we’d go over together and cross at that crossing guard that helped us get across [the] highway, we’d go over to his daddy and he’d give us some candy. But it was a big deal (to kids).

Michael: (continues to prompt) Yeah, no, that's great. Yeah, 'cause I think there's just a notion that there was some kind of dividing line and then a curfew. Does that ring a bell? Or is that—

Bob: In those days, I do not remember a curfew. Now, later on I do remember that there was a curfew for the younger people, but there wasn't just for the Anglo or just for the Mexican-American it was for all of the kids depending on their age. But that was in the, oh my gosh, '50s or '60s, actually. Back in the '40s and early '50s, I don't remember any curfew at all.

Michael: You also said there were fewer Mexican-Americans living in town, so I'm sure there were- And I've even seen the (1940) census, there's a lot of houses outside of the town—

Bob: Most of them worked on farms and lived out on the farms where they worked. Most of them, the majority, I'd say.

Michael: (returns to the chronological thread) What was APISD like back in your days? What was school like? What did it—

Bob: Oh, it was great. I think we all thought so. It was a very, very good school system, well run, good administrators, excellent teachers, the Board no doubt was a strong and a totally united Board, mostly Anglo, though it was not exclusively. The first Mexican-American that I remember being elected to the school board was J— Sr., and I can't tell you just what year, but I think that would've been probably in the mid '50s. And later, M—, whom you know, [my Uncle's] father-in-law. Yeah, a fine gentleman, M—, and so was well known for that matter; successful people that were highly

respected. Period. It didn't make any difference that they were Mexican-American or Anglo-American, nobody thought anything about it.

Michael: It seems like a lot of the folks from the early Board were business owners, or—

Bob: Almost all of them were. If not all, 100% probably were professional people.

Michael: And the purpose of school back then, was it to give people just a general sense of the world, and a sense of smarts? Was it geared toward— I don't think it was geared toward college, per se?

Bob: Oh, I think it was.

Michael: It was, okay. I didn't know.

Bob: Yeah, all the public schools, especially the high schools, to my knowledge, even that far back, they were trying to provide the quality of education that would allow students to go ahead and pass college entrance, and they did encourage. They certainly did encourage all their graduates to go to college back then, way back. I think they were all that way, the high schools.

Michael: Okay, that's really interesting. But there was also still a strong vocational component, at least in terms of extra-curriculars and stuff students did, or no?

Bob: Not particularly.

Michael: Kids didn't really want to think about work?

Bob: We had vocational agriculture in my time in high school, but we did not have the shop programs, welding, the things that they have now, which I think are

excellent, I really do. I think we need more of those type of programs available to the students. Everybody's not going to go to college, you know? And if you can teach them a marketable skill. . . .

Michael: So, 1960, graduation. What did you go and do?

Bob: Well, the first thing I did when I left high school, I went to work in the oil field. I had worked some on water well drilling rigs during the summer while I was in high school my junior year, especially. I think, and that summer I worked for [a] water well drilling company. Hard work, very, very, very hard work, but pay was decent.

Michael: Digging in the hot sun?

Bob: Oh hot, my God, you wouldn't believe. No shade or anything.

Michael: Dusty?

Bob: Somewhat. But that wasn't the big problem, the dust. It was mainly the sun. But we didn't do anything about it back then. We didn't think a thing in the world about it. I'd worked on the farm for my brother-in-law, he ran a big citrus farm out east of [the area] lake. I drove tractors in the summer, and worked irrigating and things like that, and $25 a week, that's what all the regular hands got paid. I got paid the same as everybody else. (including Mexican Americans?)

But then, when I went and got that one job on the water well drilling company . . . I think it paid a dollar [and] a quarter [per] hour if I'm not mistaken ($1.25/hr.). And I don't remember if it was overtime involved, but then later when I went to work on the regular big drilling rigs, we did get paid time and a half, overtime, over 40 hours. And it was good money, I mean, it was big money back then even— well especially to a young

kid like me. Most of the men on those rigs, the crew members, they had families, they were older, people that had a lot of experience working on oil rigs. It was very good money, more money than I knew what to do with.

And then after that, . . . ever since, probably about the time I was in the third grade, if I remember, I had gotten bitten by the flying bug. I wanted to be a duster pilot. That's what— I just revered those people, and watching those planes flying and spraying and dusting crops. Man, . . . that was what I wanted to do, so I took money from my, initially, my oil field earnings and started buying flying lessons. And then later on I actually went to work for Mr. W— there in Américo who was a flight instructor, had a training plane, among other things, and learned to fly while I was working there with him. Got my first license, well student first, but your private pilot's license with him. Later got my commercial when I was out in Florida. That's the start of that story.

I flew for over 30 years for a living and enjoyed up until the last few years. It got to where it wasn't fun anymore. . . . The business I owned there in Américo that I bought from Roland Gonzales Jr And I, more or less, kind of backed off, quit flying. When I quit operating his commercial crop dusting service, I kept one airplane and did my own flying on my own farm. And then later on, I sold the property and airplane and everything out to the others. But nobody else every operated it as a crop dusting service.

Michael: If you had family members with kids [today], would you tell them to put their kids in APISD?

Bob: We sent our son to Marine Military Academy to get a quality education because, at the time (1990s), all things considered, that boy at his age and his

temperament— he was very shy. He was small for his age. Had we put him in APISD High School, he'd have never finished high school. Period. Never would have. And I probably would've not blamed him. So, we dug deep in our pockets, come up with the money to send him down there. We knew the quality of education they would provide down there, and we've never regretted it.

I'd be I think a little bit more optimistically about it today than I did back then, you know. (discussion focuses on my sons, who attend APISD) . . . Well, they're going to have, from you and Momma both, some of the best guidance and encouragement that any parents could ever give their children. Unfortunately, a lot of our children don't have that. Your children have a tremendous advantage right there. And that alone, if nothing else, which is extremely important to me, but it's unfortunate that a lot of these kids these days they don't have that. They don't have that type of family structure. And I wish they did. I wish it were better for them.

Faith and Rey.

Faith and Rey are wife and husband. Rey is an APISD graduate from the class of '73, and Faith the class of '74. Faith became an accountant first, and then a math teacher. Rey is a disabled veteran with PTSD. When she was a teacher Rey would visit Faith for lunch and bring food. Faith served on my teaching team in APISD Jr. High, and on many days when I was busy during lunch supervising students who had misbehaved during the school day, Faith and Rey would set aside some food for me—often *pollo en salsa rojo* from the nearby gas station, or *pan dulce*. Part of her faith involved feeding others, and she would say, encouragingly "How many people have you fed today?" Here Faith and Rey share their story:

Faith: but I remember, you know, people say there was discrimination. At the time, I didn't know what discrimination was. In high school, . . . we used to have the typing classes, and there was no air conditioning in those typing classes, and there was very few Whites in there. As a matter of fact, I don't even remember there being whites. But if you go to a physics class, or a chemistry class, they were all air-conditioned. It was somebody like me ...

Michael: You weren't in physics or chemistry?

Faith: No. I actually would miss questions so I wouldn't belong to those groups, because I was intimidated. I was just as smart. I'm not intimidated now, but back then I was, because I was super poor. (looking at a yearbook) Did you see the pictures of the staff?

Michael: [Yes] but all the way from '47, which is in there in the library, '48, something like that, '49 all the way up to '84 I took pictures of the faculty, so I can look at, basically, the Anglo versus Hispanic composition. And there was a long time when it was 0%, and then there was one, and then it kind of started tilting.

Faith: (looking at the yearbook) He was [in the walkout] but he's dead now, so . . . the dead don't speak. No, it was okay. [Rey], you didn't feel discriminated against when you were in high school?

Rey: Well, no, not really. No, I wasn't discriminated.

Michael: Did you know people that didn't make it to high school, so not as obvious discrimination, but . . . ?

Faith: All his sisters; none of them made it. . . . your sisters didn't make it, because back then it was okay to drop out, and your sisters got married, what? In the seventh, eighth grade? Because they were migrants, so when they left, this guy— Tell your story, Dad. Tell your story why you think you finished high school. Because what happened when you would migrate?

Rey: Oh, yeah. When I was growing up, this was very young, and I would always— when I'd see that bus go by, that yellow bus, man, I'd go after it. . . . Anywhere and everywhere. I would go after that bus and ask, "Hey, man, how do I get in there?" [He said], "Well, you go to school." And as I started growing up, I'd still follow that bus, and eventually, everybody that I knew would drop out from following that bus. And I kept following and I kept following, and finally I got there, second grade. I was following it, and we got to the point, we went to migrate. And in the migration, working, and I would still come back in early September so I could start school, because I loved it. I loved it. "Yeah, I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna do it," [and] sure did. . . . Finally, after trying so hard, it paid off. I graduated in '74. . . .

Faith: Because back then, they wouldn't pay you bonuses until October, so the migrants had to stay over there. . . . And the bonuses were pretty chunky.

Rey: In any event, I would go back to school and I would stay with somebody, and my mother would pay them, and give me the money so I could have spending money. And the lady would have me— what is it? Room and boards.

Faith: But that was a sacrifice on the part of your mom.

Michael: Did your sisters ever finish, or no?

Faith: No.

Rey: Mm-hmm (negative).

Faith: They dropped out, every single one of them, right Dad?

Rey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michael: Were they later upset about that?

Faith: I think they still are.

Rey: No, but not really. They got some good jobs. Not good, good, like an educated job, but they got ...

Faith: They got jobs.

Rey: the eldest got . . . Her best job was taking care of kids like ...

Faith: Oh, she has a home daycare.

Rey: But that was it. Everybody else didn't get nothing.

Faith: See, and when they went to Florida, because they all stayed in Florida, they got married at very young ages, 15, 16. Right, Dad? Maggie was how old then, 14?

Rey: She was 14.

Michael: Is that where they would migrate, to Florida?

Rey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Faith: And they would stay because they had the influx of Puerto Ricans coming in, like three of them married Puerto Ricans. . . .

(Faith's sisters) All three of us graduated for the same reason. Because my dad used to go— he would migrate to West Texas, cotton field, and every time he came back it was already October, November. So, they wouldn't be retained, but back then there

was first low, first high. So they went from first low to first high. And I went from first low to second grade and . . . I caught up with them.

So they never failed, they just— they didn't repeat a grade, but in a sense they did, but it was first low, first high. And the reason they did that was because they were migrants and the school felt like they weren't ready for second grade.

And now, because of what do you call it? . . . Least restricted environment? Now nobody discriminates. Some people don't finish because they choose not to finish. But in our case it was different and we made it, we were so lucky.

Faith: So, Rey is out of 15 people, . . . 14 siblings that he had, only him-

Michael: 14?!

Faith: 15 with him. Only him and the marine, J—, are the only ones that graduated. 13 dropped out. Am I right?

Rey: Right.

Michael: 15 from the same mom and dad?!

Faith: Not the same dad. Two were from the first dad. I mean the first husband. . . . See and back then, I don't know if you know this, in the Hispanic culture, women, a lot of women were— it depends on the dad. [J—'s] Dad (former Board member, husband of Glory) didn't want none of his girls to go to college. So they didn't go to college.

Because . . . he was from Mexico and he had that belief that the man was the one that was going to sustain the home, and financially, and the woman was the housewife or the domestic wife, or whatever. So [his girls] actually they all got good jobs, but not because they graduated from college. . . . But all the boys did. The [girls] got— they

landed good jobs because of the way they spoke, they spoke— they hung around with a lot of farm people, which were Willacy County, which were *gueros*. *Sí*, they were White.

We hung around with people that were Hispanic or from Mexico. But I think we graduated because we lost our parents. Had we not lost them, I think we would have probably married early, migrated and all that. But my dad didn't want to migrate with us, he only migrated with the boys. My dad. . . . Because he was afraid that we were going to get married. . . .

You see all these people, nobody graduated from high school, from college. Some didn't even graduate from high school. . . . And why is that?

Rey: I think because they were working.

Faith: They were migrants, right?

Rey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Faith: My dad only went up to the eleventh grade, but the reason he only went up to the eleventh grade— He was super bright, but . . . my grandfather got real sick and he became legally blind. So my father came from west Texas, which is where we were born and helped with my grandma, so he dropped out of school in [nearby town] in the eleventh grade. He needed one more year to graduate, but I guess he was compelled because they had called him for service, right? And because he was the only male, boy, only male in the family, they wouldn't take the only male.

Faith: See it was legal to drop out.

Michael: Yeah?

Faith: Why was that?

Rey: Could have been the economy, couldn't it?

Michael: Well, did civil rights have something to do with people not being able to drop out?

Faith: Maybe, back then, now they say it's against the law, child labor law and not to work out in the field. Back then there was no law. If there was people didn't follow it, right? Because everybody was working out in the field, right? . . . Now if you take somebody, you migrate, you have to enroll them in school. And back then, no.

In North Town there wasn't a lot of discrimination. Not in the schools. But, let's see . . . in North Town, when I was in grade school, I cannot remember of a single, can you (Rey), Mexican teacher. They were all White. . . . See. All eight, from first through eighth grade, all White teachers for [Mrs. Faith]. All White teachers, not a single Hispanic teacher, in grade school.

This part of our conversation called to mind another limitation of assessing Anglo vs. Hispanic based on annuals. When I'm looking through a yearbook and trying to assess Anglo and Hispanic I can use surnames but that only follows the father; the mother could have been Hispanic.

Michael: What do you think that does? What effect does that have?

Faith: Mm . . . I don't know if it's because of my ignorance back then, but I thought I was getting a good education, because they spoke perfectly as far as us Hispanics, we have that accent; they were perfect— that's what happened with baby L— too. A lot of her teachers at [elementary school], they were awesome, a lot of them were White. You kind of had a fear of them.

Faith: Because they were super strict and they could hit you, they could spank you and all that stuff.

Michael: So did they spank people?

Faith: Yes! Bad. With a belt, with a palm tree, with a, let's see what else ...

Rey: Ruler.

Faith: With an eraser. (long pause) . . . To me it wasn't a negative effect.

Michael: The spanking?

Faith: No, that was.

Michael: Oh, the White teachers.

Faith: The White teachers.

Michael: So tell me about the spanking for a second, because that's come up a few times. Why would they spank students? What would be the reason that they would give?

Faith: I'm going to tell you what I think.

Michael: Sure.

Faith: It wasn't misbehavior. I think it was because they, and this is my opinion, they expected us to think the way that they did, and they weren't willing to take any slow learners. 'Cause people now, you got all these labels, right? Back then you didn't. So they wanted everybody to learn at the same level but it wasn't possible, because some people were missing out because of migrating, some people were missing out because their parents didn't speak any English at home and it makes a difference. No matter how you look at it, it makes a difference.

Michael: So do you think the ones who are missing out or who were taking longer to learn something, do you think they were spanked more because of that?

Faith: Well because they (teachers) didn't have any patience with it. Like my sister, because they weren't as smart. Let's put it that way. Like my sister, M— (class of '74), she got spanked a lot. A lot. And L— (daughter, class of 2002) got spanked, but not as much. But I never got spanked. To me it had to do with smartness. They had no tolerance for— they couldn't understand why kids couldn't think. "Hey if I teach you, why aren't you learning it?" To them there were no disabilities. Because we three came from the same household, but yet some smarts, you're book-smart, you're brain-smart, you're not book-smart. And I think my sisters were more book-smart. [My daughter] was half and half.

Rey: And I would say on the contrary, we used to have this teacher, a male, that he would actually take off his belt and belt you, in the basketball court, anywhere.

Faith: Why would he do it though?

Rey: I think, and I presume was because if you didn't act right, [if] you didn't think right, if you didn't get around with somebody [who would] act right, he'd belt you. I mean, he'd belt you there and you couldn't say anything. Then once we saw him do that, we'd kind of get, back off a little bit.

Faith: You get intimidated, because you don't know what you're going to say, what's going to spark him.

Rey: But [even then as I was] saying the ones that he actually spanked, they were like, "I'm gonna drop out anyway." . . .

Faith: But they all dropped out because they were intimidated by him. And they were not as bright, because— maybe they were bright, but he didn't give them a chance. . . . He didn't give them a chance to respond. (mimics) "You respond now, don't take two or three minutes to respond; quickly!" He was super, super tough.

Rey: And then there came back that little paddle, or what was it, board?

Faith: Yeah. It's a paddle.

Rey: With little holes in the paddle, they're gonna hurt more. Who was that, H—, no?

Faith: H—. The principal?

Rey: The principal.

Faith: The one that was missing a finger.

Rey: He would smack 'em good.

Faith: But some people got traumatized because J— brother (Glory's son) graduated with me, he said after he graduated from high school he saw Mr. S— in a parking lot at H-E-B, or somewhere, right? And he told him, "Come on, let's go at it, you and I. We're not in school anymore. I'm not a little kid anymore." And every time we see him he comes up with the same story. So he was traumatized, because he keeps repeating the same story over and over again. But he went and did well in life, because he became a teacher for [a nearby city].

Michael: Do you think the teachers cared if their behavior caused folks to drop out? Do you think they really thought that was a bad thing?

Faith: I think they, they felt empowered, until . . . I know in our school district the people that changed all that were one [Board member family]. Because one time they stole— one of the kids, you know eighth grade kids, they stole an instrument. I don't know if it was a tuba or something. They stole it, from the band hall. But they didn't really steal it, they hid it from the kid. So the teacher said, "Okay, I'm gonna spank everybody." Everybody in the class. People we were crying because we hadn't done nothing, right? Well he said "I'm gonna start with the boys." So he started spanking all the boys. But when he got to the [Board member family] kid, the kid says "You're not gonna spank me." He said, "You're not gonna spank me, I'm calling my dad."

So he runs to the office, calls his dad, and his dad was a school board member. So he comes in, and it was weird because back then the school board members were, I'm gonna say, they were all Hispanic. In North Town anyway. So then the man comes in, the school board member . . . and says "Why are you spanking my son?" [The teacher] says, "Because they stole an instrument and they're not giving it back." He says, "How do you know it was my son? You're not gonna spank my son. I don't give you permission to." . . . But a lot of the boys got spanked. I would say 80% of them got spanked. Until they got to the last kids. . . . That was one incident that I remember. And the girls we didn't get spanked.

Michael: So it sounds like school was all about trying to avoid getting spanked?

Faith: It was. 'Cause all those teachers were like, they were over, over strict. And I don't remember learning anything from them. Maybe 'cause I was so slow, or I was intimidated.

Rey: I would think that, that back then at least I thought that if you got your act together, and didn't mind the people that were low-life, migrants or whatever, right, you mind your own business, you'd make it. I thought so. . . . Those people I was mentioning, they were straight. They didn't goof off or anything like that.

Faith: Es 'que, you had to outsmart the teacher.

Rey: This teacher would get an eraser and throw it at you from one end of the corner of the room to the other. "You [better learn]!" Oh, okay.

Faith: Or he'd put your nose on the chalkboard. Those things actually happened.

Michael: I think you mentioned this about [your daughter] L— Did you used to tell her to think White?

Faith: I used to tell her . . . yeah. . . . Because I would see like the winter Texans. And I would see them always traveling, and they were not traveling alone. They used to have that Winnebago traveling. And then I would see the Hispanics at a Post Office waiting for their first-of-the month check. So, I would always tell her, *mi hija*, whenever you think, think White. She'd say "What do you mean mom?"

"Think white, you save your money." Because in my opinion, they save their money for a rainy day, and Hispanics— I thought I was a little bit white because I saved some money. But L— is now really thinking because she's saving now. But most Hispanics they live from paycheck to paycheck. They don't think.

I would save my money to take L— places because I wanted her to go out there and see the world, that there was another world. I didn't know of another world, Barnes. My father brought us to Paredes, North Town, we never migrated. That was it for us.

So I've done that, too. But what I'm saying is like when you're like all these people that are on food stamps, they party hard and in the end of the month, they have nothing. And I think that's a sad life. Because I'm saying, if they're going to give you food stamps, they're trying to help you get out of a hole. Make a better life for yourself. Then do so, don't just . . . you were teaching . . . also? Am I right, when some of these kids would say they're all comfortable with the life they're parents were living. . . .

Yeah, the low paying jobs or the hard jobs, not necessarily low paying, but dog's life, that's a dog's life. A trucker, oil field, all those places . . . Do you remember G— (our former student)? He became a trucker. Those kids that were real bright.

Rey: [Your mother] was your very first teacher, that if she even taught you a little bit, that was your very first teacher. And once that little, small grain of salt falls in your brain, you're going to learn something. And if you learn something, it's going to go and go and go, and was just that first little small thing that your mother taught you, that's going to make it.

Faith: I always told L—, look you're doing lot better than I was when I was your age. I said, but also think of where I was. You know, without parents, it was hard. She goes, "I know, Mom, you're my hero." And I said, yes. But because we gave you as much as we could, and yet we were still poor financially, but rich in spirit, then it made you a better person. Don't you agree.

And she goes, "Yes." I said, "What is it that I didn't do that might have hindered you from being where you are today, because I think you're very successful. She said, "I think that the thing that you didn't do that helped me, was that I never had a curfew."

And she never had a curfew, which was weird because I was real strict with her. . . . She says one time she went to a party, and they were experimenting with drugs, and she said "No, no, no, no. My parents don't do it, I don't do it."

Rey: That grain of salt, right there.

Michael: So the walk out would have happened when you were still in junior high. . . . And you said that your dad wouldn't let you participate even if you wanted to.

Faith: Oh no, he would have killed us. . . . Because he wanted us to finish school and that would not be in his agenda. My dad one day, he spanked my sister, because one of the art teachers in the fourth grade, he gave her a bunch of Crayolas, for drawing, . . . and my father thought she had stole them. So he made her return them and spanked her and the teacher said, "But she didn't steal them. I just saw that she liked to draw so I gave them to her." But he still spanked her.

He was just very weird. In that sense, he didn't want hand-downs. . . . People would apply for that, those staple foods that they would give them, like powdered eggs; my father didn't want none of that. He had a lot of pride. Even though we were poor he had a lot of pride, he wouldn't apply for those things. He was just different. And my father and J—'s father (Glory's husband) were the same. Super strict, right?

Oh and don't you dare get a *queja*, a complaint from a teacher, because [parents] they'd spank the heck out of you. So we'd, the young kids took a lot of the abuse from the teachers because if you would go home and complain, . . . the parents would beat the crap out of you. It's just the way they were.

Rey: If your parents were strict, I said you amount to something because one would think, "Wow, my father gave me good advice," and you'd stick to the education. Now, on the contrary, my father was a playboy, so that didn't help any. He wasn't strict at all. Everybody would just wander off. I think that strictness accounted for something back then. . . . You know how kids nowadays, they backtalk. It's true. They're bad seeds. They're worthless, and their parents get tired of them. "Just get out of here."

Quito.

Quito started school in APISD in kindergarten, in 1984. Not only is he a more recent board member, but he's a lecturer at UTRGV, and received his Ph.D. in education from UT – Austin; as well we share a dissertation committee member. For these reasons his election to the APISD school board, and subsequent selection as President of the Board, was notable (though short-lived) as many board members do not have advanced degrees or specific training in educational administration. In the audio recording of our conversation, I note that our conversation occurred on my son's birthday. How appropriate! ("Quito" is also a nickname for my son). Here is Quito's story:

Originally, I was born in Edinburg, and lived in Edinburg for three or four years. My father's mother lived here in Paredes, and so when I was about five, we moved here to Paredes, had a piece of property just south of Paredes, and then eventually moved next door to my grandmother when I was in kinder. . . . I think because the opportunity presented itself where there was property, there was a home, Paredes was the place to be.

[School] was great. It was fun. The teachers were caring, the kids were— I think my biggest challenge was I didn't speak Spanish, and so a lot of my friends did. The

only area where I felt like I missed out was in jokes, in joking. It took me years to understand the jokes. But my parents— that was deliberate on my parents' part. My parents said when they were growing up, they were going to school, they were punished for speaking Spanish. My father attended the East Town school district through junior high, and he said in elementary there were two tracks. He said if you could speak English, you had the Anglo teachers. He said if you didn't speak English well, you had the Mexican teachers. He said there was a clear distinction in the quality of education and in the opportunities provided to the students.

Michael: At what age did he feel like that tracking began?

Quito: He says as early as he can remember, so elementary, early elementary. My mother had a similar experience at Edinburg [ISD], though in Edinburg she said if the kids spoke Spanish, they made an example of them. They hit them across the hands with a yardstick, or keep them from playing during recess, things like that. There wasn't such a division at Edinburg, but it was known, you don't speak Spanish in class or in school. So consequently my parents didn't want me experiencing that, so I didn't speak any Spanish.

Both of [my parents] did well academically. I think as an eighth grader, my father was like the valedictorian in his class, and so for him, he was on a clear path to college. He excelled in athletics and academics. My mother excelled in academics and she was in music, and earned a music scholarship. So both of them went to college, but neither one of them finished. They saw that education was important, but for my father, . . . at least his experiences in college— he went here locally. He had just had negative experiences,

where he would do well, and the story that he shares with me was that he was taking a French class, and he said he had an A in the French class and he ended up failing the class.

He didn't understand why, and when he asked the professor, the professor said, "Oh, that it was a mistake and that he would change the grade," but he never changed the grade. My father's always been the one to just question authority, and so he just thought, "Well, that's just not fair, and I don't know why I'm here." So he stopped, he dropped out of school. My mother, I think, it became a matter of working. She just needed to work, I think, to provide for the family and what-not, so she stopped going to school.

I think early on, in kinder, I remember graduation. I remember graduation because I got a lot of presents. Among the grandchildren on my mother's side, I was the oldest. On my father's side I was not the oldest but I lived next door, so I think my grandmother favored me a little bit. So I was always doted upon; they would bring me presents and things. I saw that achievement provided some sort of reward, and so for me it was never a problem for me to do well in school. I wanted— I liked the recognition; I liked the awards. . . . So I wanted to do well, and I always wanted to do well. I enjoyed— whether it's first, second, third grade . . . I wanted to do well. I liked the recognition, and eventually I think my parents expected it from me; they always expected me to do well.

I think then the next interaction or even discussion was in high school. When we were on student council and we had a luncheon, I think, with board members to share our ideas and concerns about the school. I remember I couldn't attend the luncheon, but a

friend of mine . . . I was vice president, student council vice president, but a friend of mine . . . I remember the complaint that we wanted to address was the boys' bathrooms didn't have doors and they didn't always have toilet paper. We just wanted to know why? Don't we deserve a little bit of privacy? My friend said that F—, who is my uncle now by marriage, said that when he was young . . . "We were fortunate to have indoor plumbing," I think, because when he was young they didn't have indoor plumbing. For me, I left or I took that conversation and that information and felt like, "Wow, they are incredibly disconnected from what happens to students." That was the biggest thing, and that stayed with me for a long time.

I was early on tracked into GT so I had . . . Man, I remember going on field trips all the time. I remember just doing cool things and cool experiments and having amazing teachers. I think in high school it was a little different. In . . . junior high I saw more of the *slacker teachers*. I was really disappointed in my eighth-grade reading class, because it was the last day of class and I was sitting on my desk, on the desk itself, and my friends were talking to our reading teacher at his desk and he said, "Hey, what's that guy's name?" My friends told me this later after class. Then they were like, "That's Q, sir. You don't know Q?" He said, "Jay, get off the desk. Don't sit on the desk like that." I remember thinking, "Wow, what an ass." That's all I thought. I think I was one of the top two students in his class and he didn't know my name.

That's when I think I was introduced to the slacker teacher. I think in elementary school I had good teachers. They always tried their best, I think. All of my teachers were really enthusiastic about their job. They'd come in and we had a good time. We

always had fun. I think junior high and high school, that's when I started to see, "Okay, there are teachers that just don't care. This is really boring. This is not challenging at all. What am I doing here?" That's when it sort of just became routine. . . . Like, "Okay, I've just got to get through this. I've got to go through the motions and jump through the hoops, so to speak." . . .

I think I recognize inequality and inequity, and I recognized early on. I remember in elementary school, the kids that didn't speak English well, the kids that didn't have money, how they were treated differently. In elementary school, I remember they had separate facilities. They had the portable buildings. They were either in the back of the school or on the side, and that's where all of the kids that didn't speak English went.

When I got to high school I was accidentally given the wrong schedule, and so the first day of school I was given a law enforcement class and I walked in and I thought, "Who are these kids? I've never seen these kids in my life." The law enforcement teacher asked me, . . . who I was. I gave him my story and my background and he said, "Okay, you're not supposed to be here." I thought that was odd. Then senior year I had a half day's worth of classes, so I would tutor kids. I would go and tutor kids in other classes and I could see the difference. I saw the kind of education that they got and the lack of opportunities. It was terrible. The teachers were horrible. They didn't do anything and they didn't expect much of them and it was sad. It was sad.

We had this class called resource, and so I'd go in during the last period of the day and I had three students. One of them was partially deaf. The other one was a paraplegic, and the third had visual impairment. They were good kids and they just— I

don't know. I worked really well with them. I was patient with them and I did a good job, I think, of keeping them focused. I remember the instructors of the course, one day that I came in early they asked, "How do you do it?" They said, "How do you deal with them? We can't stand them." I thought, "Don't tell me. You shouldn't be telling me this. This is horrible." When I wouldn't show up, or when I had something and I couldn't be there, the students would go and they would ask for me and if I wasn't there they would leave. They wouldn't stay.

I just felt like this was wrong. . . . You could go to the same school and have a completely opposite experience of somebody who's doing well and has access to everything. I had access to everything. I was a year removed from going on an East Coast trip where I visited the best colleges in the country, and I missed two weeks of school. Most of the kids would never have that opportunity.

Quito graduated from high school, attended Stanford where he participated in an accelerated Master's program. Then he returned to teach at UTPA (now UTRGV), the regional university closest to APISD. Soon thereafter he enrolled in a Ph.D. program at UT – Austin.

Quito: Every Monday for two years, I'd teach two classes here (UTPA), I was out of class at 10:35, and then I would get in my truck, drive to Austin. Go to a 4 o'clock class and a 7 o'clock class. Then I'd drive to San Antonio, stay at an aunt's house, then drive back Tuesday at 6 a.m. because I had class. So I did that for two years.

Michael: Thinking about the board or politics, did that enter your mind at all during this period of time?

Quito: I thought about it actually early on, it must have been maybe about 2004. And my aunt joined the board in the '90s. [Glory], so J—'s wife. And, I don't know, it always left a bad taste in my mouth. I just saw, I saw good things happening at the school, but I always thought we could always do better. And I always wondered, what role do our board members play? And so I think in 2004, there was a board race and I told my mom. I said, "Hey tell your friends, tell them to write me in as a candidate." And then I started getting calls from people, from other teachers and from friends. A few were showing up at my house, "Hey is it true you're going to run for . . . ?" And I said, "What? No, I just said to write me in." [They said], "Oh, you should run." . . . It started to gain traction, and then I thought, "Ugh, you know what? Maybe I'm not ready for this. Let me take a step back." . . .

And in 2008, that was when the district blew through its fund balance, there was about $10 million in the red, had to let go of over 200 people. . . . And it just seemed to get progressively worse. And it was in 2011 when I told my wife, "You know what, I'm going to run for [APISD] Board." I'd figure I'd . . . you know, why not? I lived in the community, I loved the school. Why not give it a shot? . . . I'd always been sort of apolitical, like I just never ever . . . the most involved I ever got was my junior, senior year, I stood at a polling site for a family friend who was running for judge. And I remember sitting out there with a buddy of mine, and just encouraging people, "Hey vote for ..." And that was it; she paid us.

The district had seen better days. We had a lot of problems with facilities. There were libraries that were closed down. I remember my wife's hall, there at the high

school. The ceiling was collapsing. When you walked through, and there was a giant trash can in the middle, collecting water. . . . I used [pictures] in the campaign, and when I'd meet with people, I'd say, "Look, this is one hall." You know, my wife didn't have air conditioning for a year. And I remember there was an issue with air conditioning, where the district had to buy a bunch of fans.

Yeah. . . . I just felt like there's just no reason for this district to be going through this. When I was in high school, Lauro (Llano Grande founder) would often tell us we were the second poorest school district in the state, but we never lacked anything. Our facilities were clean. The worst was we didn't have bathroom doors, and I think that was just a choice. That was a policy choice or something. But otherwise, the schools were clean. We didn't have to deal with mold. Athletic facilities were great. Our science labs, we had everything we need: microscopes, and beakers, and things like that. You know, we took field trips all the time. And so, it never felt like we were the second poorest school district in the state. And all of a sudden, now, we're not the second poorest school district, but it feels like we're the poorest school district in the state. So that didn't sit well with me.

Because a Board member passed away, and another was removed from office, there was a rare chance to compete for 6 of 7 seats on the Board. As a consequence, four different slates ran 6 candidates each, meaning there were 24 individuals running for office simultaneously. Quito joined a slate whose slogan became "forget politics," which was an explicit call for a change to 'the way thing are done.'

Quito: When word got out that I wanted to run, and I think C— and I got together first. [We] were the first two, and then we just started putting people together. We'd meet with people, interview them. My sister-in-law was involved in the process. . . . She's a stay-at-home, homemaker. But I'd asked her to serve as our campaign manager, just because she knew a lot of people. She's that type, that she knows everybody, runs in a number of circles. . . . And so, it started to gain traction. People would come to us, "Hey, I heard you want to run for school board. I want to help you, and I want to get you candidates." And so, we just started meeting with people, identifying candidates. And it just went from there.

The APISD Board election in November 2012 was held just 11 months after Quito decided to run. His slate was not finalized until August 2012, just about 3 months before the election. Quito and his group won 6 of 7 open seats, an experience that is described in depth in Chapter V.

Just two years later, however, Quito's "forget politics" slate (their slogan) lost two of three open seats, and a third member switched sides, resulting in a 3-4 minority. Quito, who was serving a four-year term, did not run that cycle, but was up for election in November, 2016. Our conversation was recorded ahead of this election date.

Michael: What happened in the (2014) election?

Quito: I don't know. I really don't know. Because I think even in the two years that we were in office, I think for the most part we did good things. I think there was improvement, general improvement in the district.

So, while our (2014) campaign focused on the positives that we've done in office, their campaign focused entirely on negative. And even though I'd say most of what they presented was lies, and factually inaccurate, I don't know if they just out-worked our team. They just got out there and pushed more, and won the early vote.

Certainly I agree with the fact that we worked harder in 2012. As a group, we worked harder; in 2014, I know when we tried the block walking we weren't as consistent. We didn't do it in the summer. In 2012, I remember block walking literally every day. Being out there, going door to door. We didn't do that in 2014. . . . If there were any community events or backyard events where people hosted us, sometimes only one or two of the candidates could show up. So, . . . people didn't see the candidates out there. . . .

I'm up for re-election [now], right? And I'm trying to put a slate together.

The other 3 incumbent board members, originally with Quito's slate in 2012, are either not running, or so far declining to join Quito's new slate. As he continues:

I've been meeting with people since December. Interviewing people and just trying to find candidates that I think would be good to serve the community. People who have the kids in [their] best interest.

We came in and there was a superintendent that was really a puppet. And so, we got rid of that superintendent. . . . And so we brought in Dr. R— who I think had 17 years of experience as a superintendent under his belt. 16 years a high school principal. So, he knew. He knew the lay of the land; he knew policy forwards and back. He was the right man, I think at the time. We needed somebody to get things in order. I think we've

almost doubled our fund balance since Dr. R—'s been in. We've been able to take on new projects, new construction and other projects. I think there have been some improvements in curriculum, but it is far from where I'd like it to be.

So we've seen . . . progress. I think it's possible to focus, but I think that's only possible if you know what you're looking for. . . . Coming in we all thought, "Oh we're gonna do this," and I think you come in and you have to take stock and say, "Okay, as a district where are we at?" What is the pulse of the district like? What does our AEIS (state performance) report say? . . . Or what's the general mood of the district, of employees? What's the state of our facilities?

And so now, for my campaign, I'm trying to formalize my platform, and what I'd like to do, and what I'd like to see done. But I think I want to make sure that it is informed by the community, by . . . teachers, and by administrators. I'll think I'll probably sit down with Dr. R— and ask what is realistic, what can I expect if I run again, and should I win, can we do these things?

Chris.

Chris is the youngest board member and friend I interviewed. He was part of a group colloquially referred to as the "young guns," alongside his friend the Américo Mayor and current school board member R— (nephew of Bob). At one point, Mayor R— appointed Chris and I to serve together as President and Vice-President of the Américo Housing Authority Board. It was an interesting experience, since public housing supports as many as 10% of Américo residents. When residents asked me about corruption, I said truthfully that there was none as far as I could see, and that if I resigned abruptly, that would be the key sign. In 2011, 6 days into my second

term on the Board, I abruptly resigned in the face of political pressure around questionable policy, but Chris and I remained friends, authentically committed to both local history, self-actualization through education, and public service. Here our conversation unfolds:

Michael: When did you first become aware of the Board as a concept? Because you're an '03 [APISD] graduate. When did the idea of the school board come into your mind as a thing?

Chris: In my mind, probably senior year. I was taking a Llano Grande course . . . it was like an upper division international government course. There was, maybe four students. I was fortunate to be part of it, because you know, I've always been good at government, history; that's what I'm good at. Ms. D— told me, she's like, "I'll give you an A if you run for School Board." I was like, "What?" That was the whole idea. I was like, wait a second. I'm a senior. I wanted to play football, wanted to go to college. I wasn't thinking about that.

It takes money to run a campaign. It takes money to get elected. To run a grass roots campaign; we've seen it work. When I ran, it was a mixture of both. You couldn't just run a grass roots campaign, you had to have some kind of funding. It was to our advantage that there was five (6, actually) positions on the board, so that brought in more funding from attorneys, maybe other political guys that want to see you succeed, like Ramon Garcia (Hidalgo County Judge), state reps.

[Also], people weren't getting paid on time. Non-professionals were not getting paid on time. People wanted change and we were able to feed off of that and give them that, and utilize those concepts of identity and social structure. [Talking to] people:

"Hey, you know what? We're gonna get this school back together. We're gonna get people, we're gonna bring the pride back." People bought into that and that's why we get elected.

But it was short lived. Nonetheless, because you have to always remember that [APISD] counts us as the biggest employer in the area. So, money is more important than, I would say, an education. . . . That's what wins you an election, promises. They (helpers) want to be given an opportunity to make more funds, to make more money.

[When] we ran for reelection (in 2014), I lost by a 1% margin, 69 votes, out of 1300 or 1200 votes cast. I remember G— telling me "Man, that was one runner." We could have basically had— the majority would have stayed with Quito in the "forget politics" group. . . . Yeah, one person needed to win from our group to stay, to keep the majority. That's just the way it is. He broke it down as one runner that probably lost us, come on, 60 votes? 30, 20-some votes? One runner can pick that up. . . .

Chris: The *patrón* system has changed.

Michael: People tend to call it the *politiquera* system now.

Chris: *Politiqueras*, exactly, the runners. That's where the power has changed. Now the new *patróns* are who? Those *politiqueras*. Those are the new *patróns*.

There's a lot of them that aren't honest. They'll take money from both sides and there's some that our pride will come in, or vendettas will come into play. . . . Two ladies in particular were like "No, *yo no voy estar con* [*el*]," because he never paid them the money he owed them for the last candidate. They came to us with open arms.

Michael: It's interesting then, because you still get those kind of two-tier. On the top are the people who are the faces, who are going to go out and represent, but then you have the people who actually hold the votes. It's interesting that the folks who hold the votes don't seem to be particularly interested in ever seeking the position themselves. . . .

Chris: They'll produce the votes. They'll bring the votes in, and your guy gets into power; you're hired. Then, when the next election rolls in, well they're staying out of it, because they have their job. . . . Or if they're very motivated, they'll go and support you because they want to keep their job, or . . . they already have their job so they're not going to [participate], because they want to keep their job; they don't want to step on anybody's toes, especially if they feel like maybe you're on the out. You know?

I don't think it's embarrassing [to lose an election], if you're doing it the right way. . . . Of course you don't want to lose, you don't, but it's like any other competition, there has to be a winner, there has to be a loser. If that's your life, of course you're going to be pissed. . . . You're going probably to be a sore loser, obviously. You're going to hold the board off from being sworn in maybe two or three weeks, like they did when we won.

Chris explains an uproven theory that the delay prevented him from winning a full four-year term, but instead he could only fill the remainder of the term for the person he replaced, cutting just more than two years off of his tenure. He continues:

I mean, you want to win, if you have a competitive nature, you're going to want to win, but it's part of the process. You have to be educated enough to know that this part of the process, you got to respect the democratic system, the voting people in and

voting people out— the people have spoken. I never feel that, because it was a very small margin, most of the goals that we had set were accomplished, so I have no shame [and] no, I wasn't vindictive in any way.

I could have run for a four year position. I didn't. The reason . . . nobody really knows this, it's because we weren't sure if we were going to like it or not. . . . I agreed to run for that position for the specific reason [that] . . . we didn't want to commit ourselves to four years and be two years like into it and be like, "Man, this is a lot of work. This is," and I was young. I was 27, 28. I wanted, there was an idea in the back of my mind to maybe go to law school or go for a Master's. Was I going to be able to do that at the same time as being on the school board?

It's a lot of work, really, and being in the situation and the position, it was a lot of work. . . . You're in the limelight, everybody sees you; this is a politically motivated community. If you're an elected official here, you're at the same level as an actor in Hollywood. This is what this town loves. I always say that, I always compare Américo to Rome, . . . because the politics are similar and the sport is similar. People want to see blood, people like seeing that, they like *chisme* (gossip), they love the drama, and that's why bad guys get reelected here. Guys that may be ethically in the wrong.

It's all about business in the end, about making money, for those guys. Maybe it's not about making the community better in some aspects, maybe it's about making you, your life better. . . . And you know what, they help people out. But I don't know if they're masking it, or if they're doing it because, yeah, they truly want to help somebody out. . . . They want to help the people that helped them get on top. . . .

> Look at Américo, for example. One project that you and I tried to do when we were on the Housing Authority Board was developing a library. Has anybody ever taken that up? Has there been a library constructed? No. Nobody cares about education in that town.

Chris explains how the decision to hire Dr. R—, then Superintendent, was "pushed" by a "very influential, very respectable" male individual whose family has contracts with most of the school districts in the area.

> [His wife is] a physical therapist, so they do a lot of the contracts for the special education. He pushes that because they could fill those (positions) and he's going to feel it at home.

Chris maintains that despite potential ethical concerns, the Superintendent, Dr. R— was still "better than what we had before."

> They (Mexican-Americans) didn't reinvent the wheel. This has been going on—the Anglos did this before we even were here. . . . They just had a different face on the board. That's all it was. This has been going on. Historically, you can look back at Washington, or Austin. You can look a hundred years back; they're doing the same thing. Probably even worse. So it goes back to that *patrón* system. It goes back to the *politiqueras*, or the people that are supporting these inner circles, where the funding is coming from to pay for these runners, to pay for these people.
>
> It's almost like there's so much going on with the game. There's so much chaos in the current day, that I think people don't have so much space in their mind to think

about the past. Because you're looking ahead. You're like, "What's going on today? What's going on tomorrow?"

It's moving very fast. I think it's moving faster than a lot of people— But that's why they call it *The Black Hole*, too. You know, time here goes a lot slower than anywhere else. You lived here. You know. You can be sitting on a couch for like three, four hours and you're like, "What time is it? Oh, it's barely 2:00 in the afternoon." Holy shit. Time's not going by. You know, slow paced. And everything around the world is going, going, going. And Américo-Paredes is The Black Hole.

You want to see your community do well and I wish anybody that's in the future— the board members, I wish them well. I wish them well, but it's an eye opener man. . . . The amount of funds that the school district deals with is, you'll be shocked.

R—, (a new board member in 2016, Chris's friend, and Bob's nephew) he was freaking out, because Américo compared to the board is like, you're talking about maybe . . . a four thousand dollar budget (for the city of Américo) over here, and over here you got millions, a ten million dollar rainy day fund and that's just a drop in the bucket. He's like, "Man the amount of funds we have; we can do so much now?" Yeah, do good things with it. Do good things and . . . focus on education. I was at a fork in the road on one specific item. I think it was a do or die item . . . for my re-election, was to build a new softball field . . . or to fix the roofs on buildings, and [save] the funds for education. We went this way (fixed the roofs). . . .

Michael: Are your kids going to go to Américo-Paredes?

Chris: No. No. . . . The majority of the complaints came from the early childhood and it's very upsetting. The rule was that they only gave the children 15 minutes to eat lunch, right? They were constantly yelling at these kids, and I don't want to put my kid through that. Not only that, the academics is just not where [it should be]. . . . Yeah, I definitely wouldn't be putting my children through here.

Chris says he'd prefer his daughter go to the newly constructed charter school campus, part of the IDEA Public Schools system. He explains:

I mean, and [my daughter] wants to go to school here. She's all about the Parakeets. Friday night football, she love's seeing that stuff.

You carry that with you wherever you go in the Valley. We may have a good (football) team. We may not. But the thing is to me it's identity. . . . It's about identity. What makes you proud to be here? What makes you proud to be from here? Me? Personally? Historically? . . . There's the civil rights movement. There's identity. People here are tough people. They're impoverished people. There's not a lot of resources, so whatever resources you have, whatever opportunities you have being mainly . . . through politics, you're gonna run with it.

You have to create an identity. You have to use the strengths of this community for your advantage. People like football. People like the *novena*. People like politics here. So, you gotta really use that as a scholar, and if you want to be a politician, you have to use those strengths of the community. You can win an election off of the bad things in a community. You can create change for better, but you have to ask yourself the question, "Does this, the majority of this community really want that change?" Or do

they go back to the status quo? And that was obvious in my election, in my re-election. They went back to the old ways. They like the change for two years, and then, "We moved forward a little bit, but we'll take it from here." So, that's what happened, and you gotta respect the situation, but progress is not fast here. Very, very slow.

Analysis of Results

After sitting with each research participant/friend for several hours, and then poring over the transcripts, and coding them for analysis, I returned to the formal research questions that began my inquiry. For each question, a combination of etic and emic cultural knowledge and academic theory came together to form a consensus of understanding. However, at various points certain members of the study diverge in their recollections and conclusions, and we detail these contrasts as they arise.

In particular there arose a distinct difference between the recollections of Bob, an Anglo, and the Hispanic board members and classmates, regarding the conditions and quality of schooling during the period of roughly 1947-1968 (for which we have good testimony).

To be fair, my sample size for Anglos is laughably small (1), and in fact I had past experiences which suggested Bob might hold a contradictory ideological position, rooted in the context of his historical Anglo habitus, and sustained in the polarizing rhetoric of his conservative Republican brethren in Texas and throughout America. I don't want my limited oral histories of Anglos to create the false impression that I am hanging the weight of history on Bob, nor do I intend to speak ill of the deceased, for he passed shortly after our recorded conversations. Yet he is still a 'canary' of a different sort, and his tune rang clear. It does not

necessitate sophisticated software-based textual analysis (Barnes et al., 2016) to see the shift in sentiment in comments by Bob, as compared to others.

However, there were clear notes of hesitation, verbal qualifiers, like "that I was aware of" that rooted his certainties in his own understanding, and his own experiences. These same equivocations were double-edged, however, and when applied to Mexican-Americans he heard from, served to minimize their truths, for example when Bob says "apparently, at least that's what they said." Subconscious intentions are inherently difficult to probe, but it would not have been surprising for Bob to feel a bit nervous at how his comments would be framed, resulting in the proliferation of these qualifiers when speaking on his own behalf, or representing the words of Hispanic (Mexican-American) residents in APISD.

For each research question, several themes emerged among research participants/friends, and those themes will be explored in Chapter V. Here I address how each question was 'answered' by these discursive themes, transitioning from the researcher's agenda into a more organic shared discussion in the next chapter.

1. To what extent do life histories of long-time community members and leaders (e.g. board members) reflect a socio-historical narrative of oppressive schooling?

The life histories of APISD community members and leaders revealed *testimonios* of explicit racism, that include physical abuse of students for speaking Spanish, which represents a painful example of linguistic terrorism as described by Anzaldúa (1999). Additionally, tracking and segregation, legacies of the Jim Crow South, were evident from most of the Hispanic oral histories, with a persistent lack of awareness for Bob. Beyond the schooling effects of the Jim Crow era, participants/friends described the impact of political disenfranchisement, as well. As a

consequence of these oppressive socio-historical structures, several Hispanic members of the community described an implicit/explicit strategy of "thinking White" to maximize personal gains in life within the prevailing status quo system. This represents a key component of Colonization 2.0, as indigenous communities become colonized and exhibit a preference for the once-explicitly oppressive, but now (more) unconsciously dominant (White) culture. Each of the above themes will be presented as a sub-section in a broader segment called "*Testimonios* of Explicit Racism" in Chapter V. In addition, several other themes will be explored, including the 1968 walkout, and the particular experiences of migrant students and women.

The 1968 walkout represented an enduring turning point in the structure and demographic texture of politics, power, and schooling within the APISD community. Whether it was symbolic or had a causal effect on outcomes is irrelevant, because the forces that made a public act of resistance by youth possible, are the same forces that drove change within the community. These forces speak more clearly to the second research question, as I will explore momentarily, however the walkout is important because it is a direct reflection of the oppression bore by members of the APISD community. In physics, a basic principal is that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. From the powerful reaction represented by the 1968 walkout, we can infer the depth and pervasive scope of the pain felt by the community as a consequence of countless oppressive actions taken by Anglos against Hispanics in the decades preceding "the year the world changed" (i.e. 1968).

Migrant students composed at or beyond 50 percent of APISD's Hispanic student community at various points in time over the life of the school and community. That their families were beholden to macro-economic forces related to the agriculture industry is part of a

narrative that spans the length of time from the formation of APISD in the 1930s to present. Additionally, the effects of perennial dislocation from their community created uniquely challenging contexts that led to accelerated abuse from Anglos, and an even greater struggle to graduate from high school and attain good jobs in a rigged system. However, migrant students' first-hand exposure to different cultures, and to a broader narrative of resistance and civil rights, positioned them as natural student leaders in the 1968 walkout. This counter-narrative of uncharacteristic empowerment and self-actualization gives the migrant students an even more enigmatic character. There is a danger, as Adichie (2009) suggests, of confining migrant students to a single story.

Women, however, are subjected to a sustained silence, both historically and in the contemporary *politiquera* system, that makes it hard to say any version of their story (single or otherwise) has been fairly told. This is all the more ironic since the *politiquera* system is driven by the industrious politicking of APISD women. Throughout the dissertation, but especially in reflecting on narratives of oppression, women participants/friends are given space to express themselves. I do not attempt to simplify or mute their distinct perspectives, for example their dissenting subtly from characterizations of their schooling as explicit racist and discriminatory. While my female participants/friends saw evidence of discrimination, the pressure to behave and "obey"—driven by parents and reinforced by the harsh system of punishments and relative incentives (i.e. to be left alone)—led them to avoid conflict. I interviewed 2 of at most 6 female board members to serve throughout the entire history of APISD to date (*there should be more!*). Additionally, one of the classmates from the 1968-era was also female. Their stories, and more importantly a gently muted and deferential tone, sound consistent notes, which beg for further

research and exploration.

2. What systems of political power, leadership, and schooling, both historical and contemporary, help explain the "troubling" events that transpire at APISD?

Systems of political power, leadership, and schooling changed over time, represented most dramatically by the events of 1968, which signaled a shift from a *patrón* to a *politiquera* system. While the 1968 walkout is a focus of a prior section in Chapter V designed to address historical oppression in APISD (research question #1), it is also a symbolic representation of shifts in power structures, which in part answers my second research question. Specifically, a section in Chapter V focusing on the shift from a *patrón* to a *politiquera* system explores themes including the original (pre-1968) development of a colonial empire managed by *patróns*, and then the gradual, unfolding development of an alternative system (post-1968), that arose with the changing demographics of APISD from White flight and industrial decline, and a new predominantly Hispanic majority on the city commissions and school boards.

This new *politiquera* system resulted in the development of a sophisticated "game" or competition for control of the local power structures, leading to the exploitation of voting procedures, and the influx of massive spending, sourced from largely unseen business and/or criminal interests. I follow the trail of money, based on the insight given by my participants/friends, but also explore the effects of this developing system, including the use of school resources, such as jobs, as tradable chits, or political favors that can be leveraged to secure votes and control of the area's largest employer. The *politiquera* system allows slates wielding $100,000 in largely unreported (dark money) funding to acquire a political monopoly over an employer who holds a veritable economic monopoly over the broader Américo-Paredes

community. In a way, leveraging jobs to influence elections is the unchanging theme between the *patrón* and *politiquera* eras.

After exploring the broad effects of the evolving *politiquera* system, in Chapter V I call attention to an acute example in the 2008 Reduction in Force (RIF), which resulted in as many as 200 layoffs, and nearly cost me my teaching job! I am able to share the firsthand account of a female board member who endured this very difficult leadership challenge. Consequently, it is important to highlight the gender power dynamics discussed above, which result in various instances of structured silences (and micro/macro aggressions) that threaten to delegitimize women in politics in APISD. Thankfully, our participants/friends who are women demonstrate a definite resilience, yet they do not seem to be given many opportunities to express and articulate the hardships they have quietly endured as women. Even the sections I afford here are insufficient, and this is a thread that future research should address.

Interestingly, the theme of service resonates throughout the oral histories, yet it is a service that bends toward political ends. Service is a broad theme, in fact, and includes the high rates of military service within APISD and the broader RGV, especially during Vietnam, which intersects with the importance of the 1968 political tumult. More important to the schooling of APISD youth, several organizations which seem to have authentically began as social service supports, in time grew to be influential, potential "kingmakers" for political slates. I did not explore the exact intersection of service organizations, money, and actual *politiqueras*, but it does seem highly likely that the three intersect, somewhere between common activities like fundraising, group membership, political (dark money?) financing, and specific *politiqueras*. Regardless, it is clear that there is more than meets the eye, and like voting procedures, it seems

community organization structures may have long-since been appropriated to secure advantages in political power and economic gain (via school district jobs).

These themes collectively answer the question of what structures and systems explain "troubling" events in APISD, events which are at odds with 'proper' White culture, but which may not be internally opposed by the many people who actively and eagerly play the game. These themes also help set the stage for a conversation about the sustained socialization of schooling, by highlighting which elements of an explicitly racist *patrón* system have been kept in place under Hispanic rule, and which elements are unique to the *politiquera* system, but may pose harms to students (and future generations of leaders or leavers).

3. To what extent do these factors contribute to a contemporary practice of schooling as a cycle of socialization, en route to the reproduction of inequity?

This is the proverbial $64,000 question. Interestingly enough, in Texas, and APISD, per student funding runs in excess of $8,000/year, so for 14 years of schooling (Pre-K to 12), it's really a $112,000+ question. And indeed, very much at the heart of the reproduction of inequity is money. As I explore in-depth in a section of Chapter V called "Renewing a Cycle of Socialization," APISD has developed a clear cultural political economy that advantages most those members of the community who both (a) wholeheartedly embrace the *politiquera* system (play the game), and also (b) have access to networks of dark money that can provide $100,000 to fund a slate, or group of candidates for school board. By reinforcing a system driven by adherence to one dominant culture (even if a Hispanic demographic), and propped up by cash money and/or the promise of employment, APISD leaders are, as Chris suggests, choosing not to reinvent the wheel, but simply to enact a leadership change, and a set of style differences

between the *patrón* and the *politiquera.* Though Whites fled, Whiteness is sustained.

Additionally, the consequence of these sustained systems is the ingrained perceptions of deficit for students that do not achieve academic success in school, students that do not speak Spanish well (the two are sadly still related), and families that are locked into a cycle of poverty. These perceptions are reinforced by lay theories of child development and family influence. If consequences for students and families are driven by a combination of 'individual choice' in the context of 'immutable natural properties' then there is no room left for systemic inequities. The interrogation of deeper causes can be stopped by rationalizing inequality.

While these first two themes are definitely not encouraging or positive, I take time to acknowledge a distinct theme of resistance and potential indigenous cultural resurgence in the work of the Llano Grande Center. This was a development driven largely by a teacher turned educational researcher "Lauro" who sent kids to Ivy League schools in vast disproportion to prior eras and peer schools, and also embedded in the curriculum and schooling space epistemologies and methodologies that are more likely to honor indigenous communities, like oral histories. Of course, as with many programs driven by a charismatic leader that aspires to excellence, Llano Grande as a space contains promise, but also promise unfulfilled. Still, in a small, rural community that by demographic characterization would not presume to have outsized heroes, both the 1968 walkout, featured by Walter Cronkite and CBS News, and the Llano Grande Center, which received in excess of $2 million in grant funding specifically to advocate for dramatic changes to schooling practice, stand out as distinct reminders that deviation from a normalized power inequity is possible.

Having reflected on the major themes of socialization, in Chapter V I also resolve the

mystery the state of Texas failed to accurately characterize: *Why was APISD so overwhelmingly overstaffed in areas of "non-professional" labor, as compared to guidelines for staffing established by predominantly White authorities in Austin?* The answer is not one of knowledge or the absence of knowledge, but of a culture and a competitive quest for power that puts staffing in play, and makes uncertified positions the equivalent of a durable commodity ripe for trading.

Lastly, having tackled major questions, and set down new questions for future research, rather than assume it is possible to arrive at neat, packaged answers, I contemplate the future, for APISD, for the structures I document, for my research participants/friends, and for my own research agenda. *What is the proper role of hope? Is it a forced exercise to contemplate hope amidst such powerful evidence of socialization of schooling and sustained equity?* These are the most important questions I leave with, spoken through the voices of our participants/friends, and which transcend Américo-Paredes, and follow students into Texas, America, and beyond.

Chapter V:

Discussion

In this chapter, I engage in an analysis and discussion of some of the key, potentially generalizable threads within the dynamic APISD culture. I approach this holistic discourse with respectful apprehension, in honor of my unique role as an insider/outsider who cares. Among my participants/friends, I happen to be the one trained and equipped to apply the lenses of academic analysis responsibly, not simply 'ethically' as deemed by the IRB, but with the sincere consent and encouragement of a diverse mix of members within the APISD community. Indeed, I believe I would disappoint my family, friends and research participants if I declined to leverage my 'odd' status to participate in and encourage this critical, consensual dialectic, a discourse which demands answers emphatically but empathetically:

> *Who are we? Where do we come from? What glory and tragedy (and comedy?) do we share here? How does our community endure, and fight to overcome? How have our best intentions gone astray? How might we be culpable today? How can we ensure we do no harm to our children, who must be innocent? What hope can we credibly call upon, now and in the future? Is hope naïve? Is hope an invention of White colonizers, designed to keep our heads up, keep us paddling along, so we do not drown in the oppressive waters that rise to our necks? Should we just accept 'the way things are' and simply 'play the game' (of politics, of power) or else … move on, move out?*

The thick discourse, symbolized by the rush of questions above, is no longer exclusive to the community or my work as researcher, but commingled in a process of co-discovery. Here again I let the voices of the participants/friends drive the narrative. Note that few of their words

in this section duplicate from Chapter IV. This means I am introducing some 'new data,' however, placing the words adjacent to the analysis is key to elevating participants/friends' voices as valid knowledge. For while the narrative of the APISD community is collectively 'our' story today, it has been the story of my research participants/friends' ancestors and families, forever.

Testimonios of Explicit Racism

Physical abuse as linguistic terrorism.

> Roberto: When I was going to school, we were not allowed to speak Spanish. In fact, we were sent to the principal's office to get a spanking. We would get spanked. . . . That was with a paddle, and it was not just one, but four or five swings with that paddle. Bent all over. You would grab your knees.

Roberto's description of receiving spankings in school for speaking Spanish aligns with a common description provided by several research participants/friends, except the severity is more extreme than that expressed by female board members and former classmates. However, this dramatic case of physical abuse and trauma, tied explicitly to culture and use of the Spanish language, was often part of a more complex experience of reflection for participants.

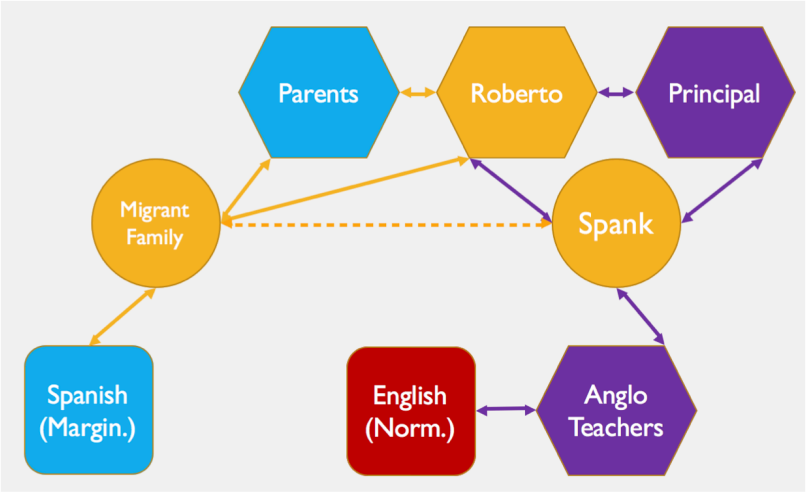

Figure 11. Roberto's memory of *spanking* as a shared experience

Applying a social network graph to Roberto's text as discourse reveals (Figure 11) that a school Principal, operating often at the request of Anglo teachers, uses the physically-abusive practice of spanking to reinforce the location of the English language as normative. This explicitly marginalizes the Spanish language, and by association, Roberto's parents, whom together constitute one of many migrant families. Note that even in the 2006 report, migrant families still constitute a significant portion of the contemporary APISD community.

Faith and Rey's description of their schooling experiences in the broader APISD area, including North Town (and for others East Town), shows how they can view their childhood through a generally positive lens, even asserting that in North Town there wasn't "a lot" of discrimination. Yet discrimination often calls to mind explicit acts of racism perpetrated by obviously malicious individuals or organized groups, such as our schools. When we examine the actions taken against Hispanic students, however, it seems clear there was in place a discriminatory system, as we'll see unfold in this conversation with Faith and Rey:

Faith: In North Town there wasn't a lot of discrimination. Not in the schools. But, let's see . . . in North Town, when I was in grade school, I cannot remember of a single . . . Mexican teacher. They were all White. . . . See. All eight, from first through eighth grade, all White teachers for [Mrs. Faith]. . . .

I don't know if it's because of my ignorance back then, but I thought I was getting a good education, because they spoke perfectly as far as us Hispanics, we have that accent; they were perfect— that's what happened with baby L— too. A lot of her teachers at [elementary school], they were awesome, a lot of them were White.

Here "accented" English, as spoken by students whose native/home/heart language is Spanish, is viewed as a deficit, while Anglo-articulated English is preferenced. Indeed, it is covert linguistic terrorism since it evokes the opposite effect in Faith, a perception that she is being advantaged, and receiving a "good education." This aligns with the cycles of Colonization 2.0, in which gifts, such as a 'proper education' are bestowed by colonizers even while the resulting effect is to erode indigenous/diverse communities and to colonize the native tongue, alongside the mind and body (i.e. through migrant labor). However, as we continue to hear Faith's description, implicit modes of violence give way to more explicit traumas:

Faith: You kind of had a fear of them (Anglo teachers). Because they were super strict and they could hit you, they could spank you and all that stuff.

Michael: So did they spank people?

Faith: Yes! Bad. With a belt, with a palm tree, with a, let's see what else ...

Rey: Ruler.

Faith: With an eraser. (long pause) . . . To me it wasn't a negative effect.

Michael: The spanking?

Faith: No, that was.

Michael: Oh, the White teachers.

Faith: The White teachers.

In this dialogue we hear matter of fact descriptions of common abusive practices, and an expanded set of abusive instruments, but a sustained reluctance to view the Anglo/White teachers as a problem in of themselves. Even if they were the ones spanking students. As Faith continues, she defines the rationale for spanking as rooted in an intolerance for differences, including those that would today be represented by special categories for all varieties of disabilities and differentiated learners, as well as migrant students and English Language Learners (ELL):

> Faith: It wasn't misbehavior. I think it was because they, and this is my opinion, they expected us to think the way that they did, and they weren't willing to take any slow learners. 'Cause people now, you got all these labels, right? Back then you didn't. So they wanted everybody to learn at the same level but it wasn't possible, because some people were missing out because of migrating, some people were missing out because their parents didn't speak any English at home and it makes a difference. No matter how you look at it, it makes a difference.
>
> They (teachers) didn't have any patience with it. Like my sister, because they weren't as smart. Let's put it that way. Like my sister, M— (class of '74), she got spanked a lot. A lot. And L— (sister, class of '74) got spanked, but not as much. But I never got spanked. To me it had to do with smartness. They had no tolerance for— they

couldn't understand why kids couldn't think. "Hey if I teach you, why aren't you learning it?" To them there were no disabilities. Because we three came from the same household, but yet some smarts, you're book-smart, you're brain-smart, you're not book-smart. And I think my sisters were more book-smart.

Faith's classification of different types of 'smarts' for young learners has some roots in the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), but there is also a sense of inelasticity, that kids are resigned to accept, or even suffer the consequences of the particular strand of intelligence they've been dealt. This concept implies a lay theory of child development, whose assumptions are not rooted in credible research, but unchallenged assumptions. The concern is the extent to which these lay theories allow people like Faith to rationalize/justify the trauma enacted, in this case on her sisters, and to spare Anglos and Whiteness accountability generally. I explore this concept in depth in a later section of this chapter. In this conversation with Faith, Rey soon took the lead, to share insight into the effect this common trauma and linguistic terrorism had on student achievement:

Rey: And I would say on the contrary, we used to have this teacher, a male, that he would actually take off his belt and belt you, in the basketball court, anywhere.

Faith: Why would he do it though?

Rey: I think, and I presume was because if you didn't act right, [if] you didn't think right, if you didn't get around with somebody [who would] act right, he'd belt you. I mean, he'd belt you there and you couldn't say anything. Then once we saw him do that, we'd kind of get, back off a little bit.

Faith: You get intimidated, because you don't know what you're going to say, what's going to spark him.

Rey: But [even then as I was] saying the ones that he actually spanked, they were like, "I'm gonna drop out anyway." . . .

Faith: But they all dropped out because they were intimidated by him. And they were not as bright, because— maybe they were bright, but he didn't give them a chance. . . . He didn't give them a chance to respond. (mimics) "You respond now, don't take two or three minutes to respond; quickly!" He was super, super tough.

Rey: And then there came back that little paddle, or what was it, board?

Faith: Yeah. It's a paddle.

Rey: With little holes in the paddle, they're gonna hurt more. Who was that, H—, no?

Faith: H—. The principal?

Rey: The principal.

Faith: The one that was missing a finger.

Rey: He would smack 'em good.

Faith: But some people got traumatized because J—'s brother (Glory's son) graduated with me, he said after he graduated from high school he saw Mr. S— in a parking lot at H-E-B, or somewhere, right? And he told him, "Come on, let's go at it, you and I. We're not in school anymore. I'm not a little kid anymore." And every time we see him he comes up with the same story. So he was traumatized, because he keeps repeating the same story over and over again. But he went and did well in life, because he became a teacher for [a nearby city].

Rey: I would think that, that back then at least I thought that if you got your act together, and didn't mind the people that were low-life, migrants or whatever, right, you mind your own business, you'd make it. I thought so. . . . Those people I was mentioning, they were straight. They didn't goof off or anything like that.

Michael: So it sounds like school was all about trying to avoid getting spanked?

Faith: It was. 'Cause all those teachers were like, they were over, over strict. And I don't remember learning anything from them. Maybe 'cause I was so slow, or I was intimidated.

Faith: I think they, they felt empowered, until ... I know in our school district the people that changed all that were one [Board member family].

Faith: Es 'que, you had to outsmart the teacher.

Rey: This teacher would get an eraser and throw it at you from one end of the corner of the room to the other. "You [better learn]!" Oh, okay.

Faith: Or he'd put your nose on the chalkboard. Those things actually happened.

Oh and don't you dare get a *queja*, a complaint from a teacher, because [parents] they'd spank the heck out of you. So we'd, the young kids took a lot of the abuse from the teachers because if you would go home and complain, . . . the parents would beat the crap out of you. It's just the way they were.

It's clear from this dialogue that the trauma of physical abuse from Anglo teachers and principals alike created a toxic culture that encouraged Hispanic students to dropout. As well, the anger lingers even after the schooling years end. Several participants/friends confirmed that parents were complicit to the extent they did not want to hear about conflict in school, and upon

hearing of conflict, would spank or "beat the crap out of you" to a degree worse than school officials. It is obvious that learning the curriculum was deprioritized, and even successful students (like Faith, who earned a degree and later became a teacher) suffered as a consequence. At the same time, Rey describes his early lay theory of child development; one where students succeed if the avoid "low-life, migrants or whatever," which is group-deprecating language that contrasts with a preference for Whiteness.

Thinking White. Several of the participants/friends referenced the notion of being, acting, or thinking White. This reinforces the notion that while Whites may have (mostly) left the APISD area, Whiteness remained:

> Glory: Some of our kids think they're Anglo. Yeah, my nieces . . . they think they're Anglo, I guess! They don't speak Spanish. But with us, our mother taught us Spanish first. . . . But I … Going back and thinking, we weren't able to speak Spanish in the classroom or outside in the playground either. . . .
>
> [Speaking Spanish] was punished then, and now I think a lot of kids— I don't know if they just kinda' don't pay attention to it, but most of the students that come through haven't capitalized on the opportunity to learn Spanish. It's Tex-Mex.

Humberto also described the consequences of linguistic terrorism as creating an unconscious preference for Whiteness, a process E.J.R. David confirms through clinical psychological research as colonial mentality: "What role models did we have? All of us wanted to be White, growing up. We wanted to be the cowboys, not the Indians" (Humberto).

The act of reinforcing that preference for Whiteness through the official school curriculum aligns with the notion of a hidden curriculum, which Humberto was exposed to through his secretive interactions with organizers from Crystal City. As he shares:

> Thing is, how many Spanish-surname people do you see in the history books? How many Spanish-surname people do you see representing us in Congress, or in the state legislature? Here it is, Texas, actually "*Tejas*" is the proper pronunciation.
>
> We are the original *Tejanos*.
>
> Sam Houston, Stephen Austin, Davy Crockett and all these people, they were illegal aliens. They came here. As a matter of fact, for them to live here they had to swear allegiance and become Mexican citizens. We did not know this. Information we did not know.
>
> I was actually receiving an education, which is what was missing in our school system. We were being lied to. Our history books were a big lie. Our civics books, whatever the government- we had then- books, were a lie. We were an invisible minority. We were nowhere in the history books. Yet my father is a World War II veteran. A decorated veteran.

By contrast, Faith saw "thinking White" as a strategy for gaming a system of advantage, and actively encouraged her daughter L—, to keep to this strategy. L— graduated from Brown University, and joined Teach For America in 2006, teaching with me in APISD Jr. High. Here is Faith reflecting on that strategy in our conversation:

> Michael: I think you mentioned this about [your daughter] L— Did you used to tell her to think White?

Faith: I used to tell her ... yeah. . . . Because I would see like the *winter Texans*. And I would see them always traveling, and they were not traveling alone. They used to have that Winnebago traveling. And then I would see the Hispanics at a Post Office waiting for their first-of-the month check. So, I would always tell her, *mi hija*, whenever you think, think White. She'd say "What do you mean Mom?"

"Think White, you save your money." Because in my opinion, they save their money for a rainy day, and Hispanics— I thought I was a little bit White because I saved some money. But L— is now really thinking because she's saving now. But most Hispanics they live from paycheck to paycheck. They don't think.

Note the deficit language directed at "Hispanics," which represents a group-deprecating tendency consistent with Colonial Mentality (CM) as expressed by David (2013b), and echoed in the identity development models of Nadal (2004) and others. As a side note, Faith mentions "winter Texans," which are a stream of Anglos, seasonal residents often living in RV parks, from predominantly Midwestern states that capitalize on the warm weather, access to beaches and bird-watching, and low cost of living in the RGV. I nearly forgot that these actual White people are a reminder of enduring power inequities. Winter Texans come by choice, to embrace selective aspects of the RGV community. They are tourists, and some communities cater to their needs, and their dollars. In future research, it would be interesting to hear perspectives from these *privileged* Anglo migrants, who arrive by RV and airplane, as opposed to Hispanics who may still crowd into *troques*. While Faith's language above represents the consequences of consciously "thinking White," ironically the actual White people who intersect the region don't tend to qualify their 'intuitive' thoughts as thinking White. In my conversation with Bob, the

Anglo I did engage, I learned he was supportive of restrictions for speaking Spanish on campus. What constituted linguistic terrorism to Hispanic students, just made sense to him. As he explains:

> I thought there were good reasons for them not being allowed to speak Spanish on the school grounds; after all we did have Spanish classes. You know, Mrs. B— was the first Spanish teacher that I remember in the school system, and man she was a lady that everybody loved to death, and does to this day. Everybody.

Interestingly, while Bob recalls Mrs. B— as an indicator of sufficient Spanish language appreciation, *en route* to a defense of pro-English, anti-Spanish policies, "Lauro" the founder of the Llano Grande center shares in his dissertation (omitted) an oral history with Mrs. B— that operates from a very different sociohistorical, and indeed activist perspective:

> [Mrs. B—] recalls the time fondly, but she also remembers the blatant discrimination faced by Mexican American students. "It's the way it was," she said, "but I loved my students, and as a teacher I could do something about helping them succeed." Within a few years, [Mrs. B—] initiated several academic, cultural, and social programs aimed at developing a range of skills for Mexican American students. (p. 110)

Bob did, after sufficient reflection, start to examine the lack of social connections between Anglo and Hispanic students outside of school, but again tended to minimize between student conflict, in the same way he did not recall discrimination:

> Bob: Thinking about the social environment back in those days, the only thing that I regret to this day about our association between the Anglo-American and the Mexican-American— that we did not socialize off campus as we really should have.

> Now, on campus, we never had conflicts. I don't remember any at all, minor maybe, but we had the same thing, Anglo versus Anglo. I remember back, two guys, Anglo boys, a couple of years ahead of me in school, they used to have the damnedest knock-down, drag-out fist fights that you ever saw in your life. And they just didn't like each other. And they'd be out maybe between classes or something and they'd walk by too close and man the fight was on. I mean serious. Really serious.
>
> But we didn't have those between the Mexican-Americans and the Anglo-Americans. We just didn't have a problem, that I was aware of. Maybe some of them felt like there was; I was not aware of it.

While Bob acknowledges a regret that Hispanics and Anglos did not socialize off campus, he declines to validate any conflict on campus, talking instead about two Anglo boys that would routinely fight. At the end, he qualifies his claims by stating he "was not aware of" any conflicts, suggesting maybe some of "them," presumably Hispanics, "felt like there was." Unfortunately, this creates a dynamic in which Hispanic participants' descriptions of conflict might not be inherently valid, but might simply be 'feelings' the held.

Interestingly, while Bob said he did not perceive any problems involving fighting between students, or speaking the Spanish language in school, he acknowledged the value of Spanish fluency in reflecting on his Anglo father-in-law:

> And they really thought the world of him as did many Mexican-American people in the community. One of the main reasons is because he spoke fluent Spanish. Very, very fluent Spanish. And they really, really liked and respected him for that because he could communicate with them so well.

Taken all together, Whiteness operates silently as the unspoken 'common sense' *AOEM* for Bob, but also affects the perceptions of Faith and Glory, who explicitly encouraged, or implicitly observed (respectively) their children thinking White.

Tracking and segregation.

Roberto: The grade assignment, even within the grades, you had your upper group and your lower group, and the group of Hispanics, guess what, automatically, you were in the lower group. The expectations were lower. There was segregation. It was very evident. . . . If you were Hispanic, if you didn't speak English perfectly, if you weren't a member of the Hispanics that were better off in the community, you were looked at as someone who was going to dropout along the way, and you were not going to make it in the professional fields.

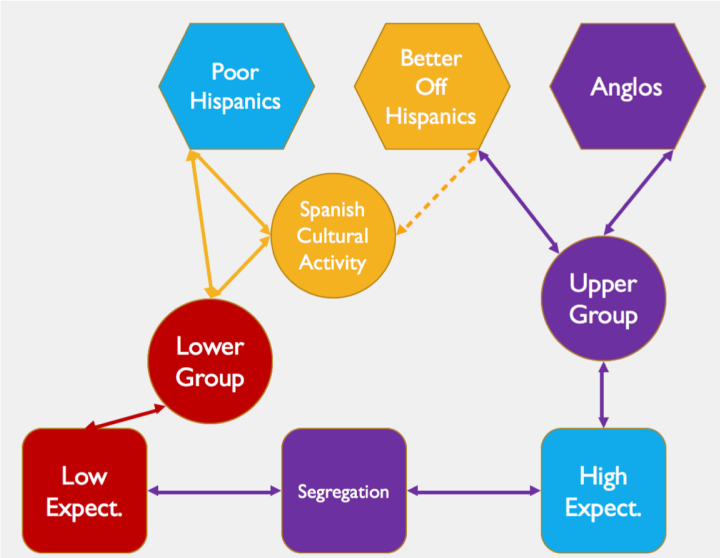

Figure 12. A system of segregation based on participation in Spanish cultural activity

I contextualize Roberto's discourse on tracking and segregation through a social network visualization (Figure 12). While similar themes as before are present, such as the marginalization

of Spanish and the predominance of English, there are new secondary and tertiary structures revealed in this text. Hispanics are not homogenous, but partitioned into *better off* and *poor* Hispanics, based largely on whether they participate in "Spanish cultural activity" or reject this practice in order to gain access to the *upper group*, dominated historically by Anglos. This compares to a *lower group*, which is isolated within the school system, and subject to low expectations. Thus, a more comprehensive system of segregation is laid bare.

Faith's two sisters were also affected by the high/low separation of grades, which also represents an intersection of the migrant student experience addressed in a later section. They did graduate, but would be delayed, as Faith describes:

> My dad used to go— he would migrate to West Texas, cotton field, and every time he came back it was already October, November. . . . back then there was first low, first high. So [my sisters] went from first low to first high. And I went from first low to second grade and . . . I caught up with them.
>
> So they never failed, they just— they didn't repeat a grade, but in a sense they did, but it was first low, first high. And the reason they did that was because they were migrants and the school felt like they weren't ready for second grade.
>
> And now, because of what do you call it? . . . Least restricted environment? Now nobody discriminates. Some people don't finish because they choose not to finish. But in our case it was different and we made it, we were so lucky.

In a way the perception of change represents a transition from an explicit Anglo authority (the school) who "felt like they weren't ready" as compares to people today who 'choose' outcomes for themselves. Of course, as we continue to explore, students today are still faced

with educational inequities, and placing accountability wholly on the individual reinforces the twisted nature of Colonization 2.0. Humberto below describes what was a gradual process of becoming aware of tracking, for himself and other Hispanic students. As he shares:

> When I got to the fifth grade, that's the first time I saw *gringos*, okay? I said, "Whoa!" I mean that's the first time. I remember staring at them because I really had never interacted with *gringos*. At Paredes Elementary? Not one gringo, okay? Just the teachers. No offense, of course. I realized, you know, that there was another world out there.
>
> The only time that we would see gringos was when we would go to— There was three theaters in Paredes. There was *El Alameda*, which is now our VFW headquarters. And then there's the Power Church that was *El Roxy*, if I'm not mistaken, and then the Tropic. It was right across from the street from the old H-E-B. As a matter of fact, that's where the pharmacy's at now, next to G—'s Flower Shop. That's where just the White folk, the Anglos, would go (the Tropic). And there was a balcony, like all theaters had. There was a balcony there and that's where those of us Mexican Americans would be; were allowed to sit. We didn't think anything of it.
>
> But later I come to realize that, especially when I was in the fifth grade, that I was actually getting better grades than the Anglos. And then, in the sixth grade, that's when then begin tracking us, okay? I didn't know that then. They put me in the class where the Anglos were, I guess, just as smart as I was. So, we became good friends.

Beyond segregation, tracking also exposed students to very different educational environments, including the quality of the facilities, and resources. A 1950 Master's thesis by former APISD teacher Carlos Calderón captures these differences with original photos pasted

onto the pages of his thesis. Since retrieving this artifact from the UT – Austin library, I allowed Américo-Paredes elders at coffee to "borrow" the community treasure, and have yet to track it back down. So I'll leave it to Llano Grande founder, and oral history champion "Lauro" (2003) to share a bit of Calderón's insight:

> The Mexican school had outhouses, one water fountain for everybody, and poorly lit rooms. The Red Brick School, on the other hand, was a newly built, spacious school with indoor restrooms, good lighting, and more experienced teachers. (p. 54)

Faith describes discovering a similar reality of unequal facilities firsthand in high school, and contemplating how hard it was to see the difference as discrimination:

> I remember, you know, people say there was discrimination. At the time, I didn't know what discrimination was. In high school, . . . we used to have the typing classes, and there was no air conditioning in those typing classes, and there was very few Whites in there. As a matter of fact, I don't even remember there being Whites. But if you go to a physics class, or a chemistry class, they were all air-conditioned. It was somebody like me ...
>
> Michael: You weren't in physics or chemistry?
>
> Faith: No. I actually would miss questions so I wouldn't belong to those groups, because I was intimidated. I was just as smart. I'm not intimidated now, but back then I was, because I was super poor.

The consequences of discrimination in school could be compounded by the attitudes of certain families within the community, especially with regard to gender roles. One of Faith's closest childhood friends saw this affect his sisters. These are also Glory's daughters, so conversation with Glory on this topic may prove sensitive. Here's Faith's take:

[J—'s] Dad (former Board member, husband of Glory) didn't want none of his girls to go to college. So they didn't go to college.

Because . . . he was from Mexico and he had that belief that the man was the one that was going to sustain the home, and financially, and the woman was the housewife or the domestic wife, or whatever. So [his girls] actually they all got good jobs, but not because they graduated from college. . . . But all the boys did. The [girls] got— they landed good jobs because of the way they spoke, they spoke— they hung around with a lot of farm people, which were Willacy County, which were *gueros*. *Sí*, they were White.

Upon reflection, I wonder about the limits of phenomenology, allowing someone to describe as part of an oral history the experiences of a friend's family, ascribing beliefs to their father, without his input. In a sad twist, Faith considers that she and her sisters avoided a similar fate because her parents passed away, yet she also expresses her Dad's differences of perspective, that he did not want his daughters to marry young:

I think we graduated because we lost our parents. Had we not lost them, I think we would have probably married early, migrated and all that. But my dad didn't want to migrate with us, he only migrated with the boys. . . . Because he was afraid that we were going to get married. . . .

You see all these people (we are looking at an annual), nobody graduated from college. Some didn't even graduate from high school. . . . And why is that?

Rey: I think because they were working.

Faith: They were migrants, right?

Rey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Faith: Now they say it's against the law, child labor law and not to work out in the field. Back then there was no law. If there was people didn't follow it, right? Because everybody was working out in the field, right? . . . Now if you take somebody, you migrate, you have to enroll them in school. And back then, no.

Sometimes the consequences of racism were more subtle, as in the case of Glory's brother, who was retained until the school eventually discovered he had trouble seeing and simply needed glasses.

My conversation with Bob was very interesting. In some ways, he seemed to describe a system of segregation based on race and language, and yet seemed to insist there was no system at all. That section of our conversation is shared here:

Michael: Did you find that it was rare to go to school, or was it common to go to school? How common was it for kids to be enrolled in school and certainly be enrolled all the way through high school?

Bob: It was very common back then. Now, the Mexican American children versus the Anglo children in many cases they didn't go through with graduation. But they had, and I don't specifically remember the school, but I know of it and know where it was located. There was a school they called *El Diablo*. You've probably heard that name in Américo. And it was somewhere just north of the Catholic church and Américo right now. And that was a small district, and it was for the Mexican American students that spoke no English, that's all it was for. It was to teach them English so that they could merge with the mainstream classes later on. I think, if I'm not mistaken, most of 'em moved from

there to the mainstream in about the third grade. I believe that's right. Second or third grade, something like that.

By then, they'd taught 'em enough English that could function in the regular environment, which was all taught in English at that time. As many of them didn't go ahead and stay all through graduation because of, you know, poor people, and families needed help and they would drop out. Some of 'em migrated, even back then, migrated up north or to West Texas during the season for subsistence reasons. And their kids would go with them, naturally, and so a lot of 'em didn't actually finish high school. But a lot did too. By the time I was a senior, my senior year, I'd say probably the majority of the Mexican American students finished. The ones that started school graduated from the high school.

Michael: You're saying there was basically a change, even from when you entered school to when you graduated (1947-1960)?

Bob: Yeah, there were a lot of changes as a matter of fact. That was in reference to what we were discussing. Those who, of the Mexican American families, actually stayed from beginning to graduation.

There's a lot to unpack here. My first question did not specifically address Mexican Americans, yet Bob either anticipated my interest or otherwise recalled a strong sense of difference between Anglo and Mexican American student outcomes. This was the first mention I'd heard of anything called *El Diablo*, and since it means "The Devil," I'm doubtful it would have a positive connotation, and likely aligns with notions of deficit thinking (Delpit, 1995). Upon reflection, he is likely referring to the segregated Americo neighborhood called *El Rincón*

del Diablo (The Devil's Corner), which did possess a segregated school constructed out of repurposed military barracks ("Lauro", 2003, p. 53).

This deficit thinking, or *subtractive schooling* (Valenzuela, 1999), is reinforced by the clear impression that students were placed in an alternative space because of what they lacked (English-language experience) rather than an additive approach that would value their Spanish-language experience. Also, while Bob later denies there is any evidence of tracking in APISD, and rejects the notion that there was a low and high track in first grade, he acknowledges that students might have "merged" with the Anglo "mainstream" beginning in second or third grade, after the time that such tracking would have taken effect. Likewise, he does not consider how this subtractive approach, and the students he may never have met due to tracking, might contribute to a high dropout rate for Hispanic students in particular.

Bob ascribes only parents' economic and labor motives, including as migrants, to students' inability to graduate. While the other oral histories suggest this may be true in some cases, the Hispanic board members and classmates, who all graduated after 1960, described a very different overall experience.

> Bob: Yeah, all the public schools, especially the high schools, to my knowledge, even that far back, they were trying to provide the quality of education that would allow students to go ahead and pass college entrance, and they did encourage. They certainly did encourage all their graduates to go to college back then, way back. I think they were all that way, the high schools.
>
> Michael: Okay, that's really interesting. But there was also still a strong vocational component, at least in terms of extra-curriculars and stuff students did, or no?

Bob: Not particularly.

Several of my participants/friends described the influence of the railroad tracks in segregating the community, through explicit laws and implicit rules of order. Iris was one of the few who tested the limits of segregation:

> Anyway, when we moved here, everybody around us was White. Everybody. We were the only ones (who were Hispanic). And friends would ask my husband, "How did you do it to get into that neighborhood? How did you— Do you have money or what?" Well, then eventually, they (the Anglos) sold. Eventually, they sold and they sold and everybody started selling. And some people say it's because we had moved into the neighborhood as Mexican Americans. I don't know if you ever heard this but from the railroad tracks to the north, there was only Hispanics. From the railroad tracks to the south, there was only Anglos. I mean that railroad track was very, very real. And my children were even asked, "How did your dad get that house?"

"That house" is a small, unobtrusive wood frame home located directly across from the main entrance of the school my sons attend. I sometimes park right in front of Iris' house during the rush of traffic to pick students up. As Iris continues:

> And so that was kind of like people would wonder like, "Well, she's on the other side of the road— of the railroad tracks." And eventually, it kind of like faded away and then people (the Anglos) started moving out and more people (the Hispanics) started buying houses here.

On the issue of neighborhood segregation, defined by the railroads, Bob did not deny that there was some sense of separation, but minimized the scope of the problem, though he ultimately limited his perceptions to what "my group" (Anglos) thought about:

> Michael: Trying to just get a sense for that '47 time-period, or as you started in school, there was [an old blue law] that was established when I came into town, they created a division between north and south of the train tracks. Was that something you were familiar with, or what do you—
>
> Bob: Well, it's something that we may have known there was little bit of a difference, but it wasn't strictly north and south, at least not in the case of Américo. Because there was Anglo neighborhoods on both sides of the railroads, both north and south. Mostly the Mexican-American people in Américo, [that] lived in town at that time, which weren't all that many really, did live north of [the main east / west state highway]. But generally speaking, between [the state highway] and the railroad and I think there was a couple of small neighborhoods north of the railroad that were almost exclusively Mexican-American neighborhoods at that time. But we never thought anything about it, you know. I mean, we meaning, my group we never thought anything about it.

Bob's relative lack of awareness of segregation recalls to mind the refrain, 'out of sight, out of mind,' which may have applied to segregation in APISD, as well throughout the genteel Jim Crow South.

The impact of Jim Crow. Schooling in APISD in the decades preceding the 1968 walkout were embedded in the context of the 20th century Jim Crow South, which Lauro (2003) describes in his dissertation:

> Towns and schools alike operated under the dictates of segregation, and corresponding social and cultural conditions reflected this reality. As in most South Texas towns, Anglos lived in one part of town, and Mexicans lived in another. Local schools, segregated by ethnic groups, supported the racial social constructs; Anglos children attended one school, while Mexican children attended another. Consequently, a two tiered system evolved where leadership positions in the economy and in the schools were taken by Anglos, and most of the menial laboring jobs were occupied by Mexican people. (p. 2)

The research participants/friends have both recollections, and stories passed down regarding voting restrictions and other evidence of Jim Crow:

> Roberto: Back in the sixties, there was a poll tax. You had to pay a tax to the [county] to be able to register to vote and most people didn't have the money, so they didn't register to vote. That's the one that I'm most familiar with. There was also a literacy test at one time. You had to be a property owner to be able to vote. And one by one, those obstacles were eliminated by the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
>
> Chris: [Prior to the civil rights era, voters] didn't even know. There wasn't any information to get them to vote. They didn't know that there was a deadline to register to vote. There was a literacy test. There was Jim Crow tactics in place on minorities in the Valley to prevent them going to the polls.

Humberto also described the Jim Crow laws, as well as a peculiar rule for Texas state troopers, which he began interrogating as part of his 'education' over a series of months of secretive meetings with community organizers from Crystal City and other places.

> Humberto: Back then they had the poll tax, and then all kinds of barriers. [Department of Public Safety (DPS)] troopers, you're going to be a DPS trooper, you had to be so tall. You know, six foot, something like that. Well, that leaves me out. They had all these laws and regulations that hindered our development. Our participation in the democracy.

An oral history transcript housed with the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum (Byrnes, 2006) confirms the existence of a height requirement, eventually invalidated by law, which might have prohibited Hispanic participation, and in fact was reinforced by an explicit requirement to be a "White male" as late as 1970. The DPS height requirement was not rescinded until 1982, according to one report (Quackenbush, 2011).

The discriminatory effects of Jim Crow laws mirrored events that transpired in the school system. In one case, a Hispanic student was prevented multiple times from succeeding in a student election. As Glory shares:

> [S—, a relative] (Hispanic male) ran for student council president and the principal's son was running for student council president. They had the elections, S— won. "Oh no, there was something wrong, the votes had to be recounted," whatever. They had to have another election. Three times, they voted. The last time he won big time, but they always found some excuse for not giving him the election.

1968 Walkout as Reaction, Resistance. In late 1968, students at APISD high school ("the student committee") organized with the support of a local college group called the Mexican

American Youth Organization (MAYO) and began to take a stand against the administration and predominantly Anglo school board. Students drafted demands, and asked that an emergency meeting of the school board be called. When that request was declined—board members claimed they wanted to wait 5 days until the next regular board meeting—students walked out at 8:10 a.m. on Thursday, November 14, 1968. Subsequently, more than 100 students were suspended, several arrests made, and an ensuing legal battle began.

As one article (Lauro, et al., 2004) shares:

> In the summer of 1968 Hector Ramirez, an Edcouch-Elsa High School student who had just completed his junior year, found a ride to Michigan with a local family that made the trip every year as migrant farm workers. Hector's destination was not the fields of southwestern Michigan; instead, he went to Detroit to work on an automobile assembly line. As Hector worked in the factory that summer, he learned firsthand how powerful, organized labor unions addressed unsatisfactory working conditions. He learned lessons in organizing, planning, and mobilizing people as he came into contact with labor leaders.. The labor experience in Detroit would transform him. He returned to south Texas early that fall with a new awareness of the power of mass organization.
>
> Hector acted as a principal leader of the Edcouch-Elsa High School Walkout of 1968. On the morning of November 14, 1968, at precisely 8:10, a number of Mexican American student protesters stormed out of the classrooms chant-ing "Walkout! Walkout!" thus igniting a massive student boycott of [Américo-Paredes] High School. More than 150 students followed as they chanted phrases of protest against what they charged was an unjust educational system. The Américo-Paredes High School Walkout

of 1968 became the tipping point (Gladwell, 2000) in a shift of power from White (Anglo-American) to brown (Mexican American) in south Texas. After decades of a dominant segregationist culture throughout the region, Mexican American high school students in this agricultural community forcefully challenged the power structure in the schools and in the community at large. (Lauro et al., 2004, p. 506)

On November 16, 1968, the regional paper printed a list of 15 demands of the striking APISD students. As they tie directly into the narratives and *testimonios* shared above, I will reprint them here in full:

We, the student body of Américo-Paredes Junior and Senior High School, demand of the officials and administrators:

1. That no disciplinary action be taken against any student or teacher that has taken part in this movement and that all suspended students and teachers be reinstated to their previous post or office and that any mention of such action be omitted from school records. Also, all intimidations should stop.
2. That no threats, intimidation or penalties be made against any student by teachers or administrators for membership or attendance of meetings of any club or organization outside of school.
3. That the students be allowed to select their own candidates for student council-- it should be the students student council.
4. That excessive and unfair penalties and punishments stop being given students for minor infractions of completely ridiculous reasons, for example: student suspended three days for failure to keep appointment with teacher after school; student

suspended for three days for failing to stand at school pep rally; if something (shorts, tennis shoes) are stolen from lockers the students are punished (paddled or sent to do manual labor) for not being able to suit up.

Likewise, that due process be followed in cases of suspension or expulsion of students, that is, that a student be given opportunity to defend himself and that evidence be presented to both administrators and parents. Also no paddling should be given student until explanation for punishment be given to parents, if students request such explanation.

5. That no teacher or administrator shall use profanity or abusive language in presence of students and in no case shall any teacher or administrator lay a hand on a student.
6. That, in the case of tardy or absent students, the students be allowed to reenter class and no points taken off until his excuse is verified or not. Students should not be kept out of class till parents call school.
7. That either the price of the cafeteria lunch be lowered to a more reasonable price or that more and better foods be served.
8. That, as Chicano students, we be allowed to speak our mother tongue, Spanish, on school premises without being subjected to humiliating or unjust penalties.
9. That courses be introduced, as a regular part of the curriculum, to show the contributions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to this state and region. For instance, factual accounts of the history of the southwest and Texas, courses in Mexican history and culture. Also, that qualified, certified teachers be hired to teach these courses.

10. That all college preparatory courses be singled out for students by the time they enter high school.
11. That more effective counseling be given students from understanding counselors that are able to relate to students. Present student-counselor ratio is too great; we need more counselors. Likewise, more assemblies on career opportunities, availability of scholarships, grants, loans, college entrance requirements, etc.
12. Finally that the blatant discrimination against the Mexican American students in this school stop immediately. We demand justice.
13. That regulations for passes be set down clearly and defined so that no question remains as to when passes are needed or not. The present system, or lack of it, is ridiculous.
14. That special attention be given the situation a great number of students find themselves in-- that is, they are migrant workers. Student choices of subjects in spring registration be respected and adopted in the fall term. These subject forms are often disregarded.

    Migrants leave school early they take part in an accelerated program. Advance tests are supposed to be given before they leave. Often teachers do not let migrants take tests or do not send tests to students up north after them. All tests should be given to migrant students before they leave.
15. That school facilities be improved, renovated, replaced or installed where appropriate. For example:

    Fans – teachers often use fans only for their own comfort, ignoring students.

Heaters – The heaters are for the most part outdated and not in working order.

We need new heaters.

Restrooms – Some of the restrooms and toilets are not cleaned and are inoperable; constantly out of repair.

Windows – Fix broken windows.

Walls – Repair holes in wall. Give school buildings a face lifting.

How about hot water for the showers.

We want to be proud of our school.

Here Are The 'Demands' Of The Striking Students

— The demands being made by striking students total 15. They are reproduced here.

The 15 "Demands" are set out in petition form, with the heading: "We, the student body Senior High School, demand of the officials and administrators."

The demands are:

1. That no diciplinary action be taken against any student or teacher that has taken part in this movement and that all suspended students and teachers be reinstated to their previous post or office and that any mention of such action be omitted from school records. Also all intimidations should stop.

2. That no threats, intimidation or penalties be made against any student by teachers or administrators for membership or attendance of meetings of any club or organization outside of school.

3. That the students be allowed to select their own candidates for student council--it should be the students student council.

4. That excessive and unfair penalties and punishments stop being given students for minor infractions of completely ridiculous reasons, for example: student suspended three days for failure to keep appointment with teacher after school; student suspended for three days for failing to stand at school pep rally; if something (shorts, tennis shoes) are stolen from lockers the students are punished (paddled or sent to do manual labor) for not being able to suit up.

Likewise, that due process be followed in cases of suspension or expulsion of students, that is, that a student be given opportunity to defend himself and that evidence be presented to both administrators and parents. Also no paddling should be given student until explanation for punishment be given to parents, if students request such explanation.

5. That no teacher or administrator shall use profanity or abusive language in presence of students and in no case shall any teacher or administrator lay a hand on a student.

6. That, in the case of tardy or absent students, the students be allowed to reenter class and no points taken off until his excuse is verified or not. Students should not be kept out of class till parents call school.

7. That either the price of the cafeteria lunch be lowered to a more reasonable price or that more and better foods be served.

8. That, as Chicano students, we be allowed to speak our mother tongue, Spanish, on school premises without being subjected to humiliating or unjust penalties.

9. That courses be introduced, as a regular part of the curriculum, to show the contributions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to this state and region. For instance, factual accounts of the history of the southwest and Texas, courses in Mexican history and culture. Also, that qualified, certified teachers be hired to teach these courses.

10. That all college preparatory courses be singled out for students by the time they enter high school.

11. That more effective counseling be given students from understanding counselors that are able to relate to students. Present student-counselor ratio is too great we need more counselors. Likewise, more assemblies on career opportunities, availability of scholarships, grants, loans, college entrance requirements, etc.

12. Finally that the blatant discrimination against the Mexican American students in this school stop immediately. We demand justice.

13. That regulations for passes be set down clearly and defined so that no question remains as to when passes are needed or not. The present system, or lack of it, is ridiculous.

14. That special attention be given the situation a great number of students find themselves in--that is, they are migrant workers. Student choices of subjects in spring registration be respected and adopted in the fall term. These subject forms are often disregarded.

Migrants leave school early, they take part in an accelerated program. Advance tests are supposed to be given before they leave. Often teachers do not let migrants take tests or do not send tests to students up north after them. All tests should be given to migrant students before they leave.

15. That school facilities be improved, renovated, replaced or installed where appropriate. For example:

Fans — Teachers often use fans only for their own comfort, ignoring students.

Heaters — The heaters are for the most part outdated and not in working order. We need new heaters.

Restrooms — Some of the restrooms and toilets are not cleaned and are inoperable; constantly out of repair.

Windows — Fix broken windows.

Walls — Repair holes in wall. Give school buildings a face lifting.

How about hot water for the showers.

We want to be proud of our school.

NOV 16

Figure 13. Copy of November 16, 1968 walkout article (APISD references redacted)

Source: archives of the Museum of South Texas History

I was moved by the deep sincerity of some of these requests, especially the more modest. Not a request for paddling (swats) of students to cease entirely, for example, but simply that an explanation be given to parents before the paddling, if the student requests. Indeed, currently in APISD administrators can and do on occasion seek consent from parents to swat or paddle students using a large wooden board.

Likewise, the call to have courses that honor "contributions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to this state and region" echoes the current-day struggle, nearly 50 years later, to have legitimate Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses in high school. Texas recently granted these courses elective history status, but adopted a textbook written in haste by a for-profit company, without the involvement of the community, or Mexican American scholars, and which was widely regarded as racist and likely to perpetuate White supremacist notions.

In the area papers, editorials reinforced the status quo, in one case advocating on behalf of English-only school policies, declaring "Knowledge of English Essential in America," and declaring at one point, that "fluency in more than one language is a splendid accomplishment—an advantage, if you will. But to be barely literate in two languages and accomplished in neither is not helpful" (Nov. 17, 1968 editorial, citation omitted).

An even harsher editorial was published by "responsible American citizens of Latin extraction" under a banner of "The People's Voice," and authored by a Mr. Dominguez, who writes of the APISD protestors:

> (1) You may or may not have justifiable reasons for seeking redress of wrongs allegedly perpetrated against you. This remains to be seen.

(2) Be that as it may, your approach to the solution of such grievances classify's you as utterly immature, irresponsible youngsters. Let us follow your reasoning to the point of absurdity just to illustrate what we mean.

   a. You would hurt your state allocation of funds by being absent from school? How ridiculous! You can't see beyond your noses – so next year you will have a poorer school system, and you will be castigating yourselves by making it impossible to ameliorate the very same deficiences (sic) that you want to rectify.

   b. You refuse to accept the English language and want to force the anglos to learn Spanish. How absurd! Don't you realize that a bi-lingual individual is more, and better, educated than the person who speaks only one language?

The solution to your problems is to do exactly the opposite of what you're doing.

   a. You should attend classes as much as possible in order to get a better state allocation of educational funds for your schools. The more money available, the more improvements you would have.

   b. You should make an effort to learn to write and to speak the English language as correctly as you can.

You might start by learning to speak correct Spanish in the first place – there is no such word as "Chicano." You have labeled yourselves with the mark of ignoramouses (sic) worse than the "Pachucos," who have no idea of what you're doing. Countless persons whould (sic) gladly pay for the privileges that you're stomping into the ground.

Don't listen to those imported goons that are schooled in the creation of caos. They are communist trained to divide and conquer.

We apologize to all our good anglo friends for the behavior of these little infants. "Forgive them; for they know not what they do." (November 18, 1968, source omitted)

Aside from the bitter irony of seeing so many spelling and grammar issues in a letter decrying APISD students' poor language skills, this editorial aligns with a common Anglo excuse that "professional, outside agitators" played a role in stimulating student protests. Incredulously, almost exactly the same headline can be seen today, in pro-gun conspiracy theorists' claims of "crisis actors" leading student protests after a tragic school shooting in Florida (Arkin & Popken, 2018). In the case of APISD, however, it seems true that Chicano/Latino/Mexican American activists were 'spreading the word' and encouraging student organizing, but not to the extent of collaborating with the Russians (another strangely persistent contemporary geopolitical theme). The "red scare" is leveraged in this context as yet another attempt to delegitimize and silence APISD students' and broader Mexican American voices.

Another deeply ignorant and openly racist (and eugenicist) "letter to the editor" on November 20, 1968, implied the walkout might lead us back to "the good old days in the African jungle," equally demeaning African American efforts at achieving social justice. A later November 29 editorial referred to the walkout as potentially being, "another Watts holocaust."

The 1968 walkout at APISD drew national attention, including a segment on the November 29, CBS News broadcast anchored by Walter Cronkite. Here is the transcript of that summary of events:

Walter Cronkite: [A] civil rights protest by Mexican American students in Américo, Texas has spread to two other locations in the Rio Grande Valley. The story of that movement from Ed Rabel.

Ed Rabel: This is the Rio Grande (river), which flows the length of the Rio Grande Valley. It is a lush valley of citrus groves, where Mexican Americans attracted by the agriculture industry, outnumber the Anglo population. The practice here has been one of domination, the Anglos dominating the Latins. But the Mexican Americans say that day has ended, that they are on the move, that they will have a piece of the action.

Mexican American students at a school in the Valley community of Américo have been demonstrating for what they say are their rights. The school district expelled about 175 of the students after they staged a walkout and began the demonstrations. Later, the students presented a list of demands, one of which challenged the school's alleged policy prohibiting the speaking of Spanish on the school grounds.

Interviewer: Why is it very important to you that you be allowed to speak Spanish on the school grounds?

Male APISD Student 1: Well, that's our Mother tongue, so I don't see why it should be taken away from us.

Male APISD Student 2: We were born of Mexican American parents and we have to speak Spanish to 'em, and they want us to forget out native tongue, and I don't think that's fair for us.

Ed Rabel: School officials deny charges that speaking Spanish on school grounds is prohibited, although they say they strongly encourage pupils to speak English. They also

deny charges that Mexican American students have been physically abused. At a special meeting between board members and parents, school superintendent B— (Anglo) denied the allegation that faculty members have been guilty of blatant discrimination against pupils.

Superintendent B--: I can [give you] the official stand of both the school board and the administration and that is [that we] will not have discrimination in the school system. There may be isolated cases of discrimination that we don't know about. And I say quite frankly, if we do have them, I'd like to know about them, because we're not supposed to have them.

Interviewer: What is the attitude of the administration toward Mexican Americans?

Female APISD Student: In my opinion, they have always been pushing us, and I think it's time for us not to be pushed around so much like they have.

Interviewer: They want you to say, "Well I regret what I've done and I won't do it again." They want you to do that in order to get back into school. Will you do that?

Female APISD Student #2: No, I won't.

Interviewer: Why?

Female APISD Student #2: Because, well, I don't feel sorry for what I did. I think it's right.

Ed Rabel: The school dispute exemplifies the new spirit pervading Mexican Americans who live along this river. The Mexican Americans here hope their new spirit will bring a better life to them. Ed Rabel, CBS News, in the Rio Grande Valley.

Walter Cronkite: A federal judge has ruled those school suspensions invalid, pending individual hearings for each student.

It is important to note the prominence of that broadcast in the memory and resilience of the APISD community, as the locally popular recording became a proxy for the walkout itself. Here, however, we can compare that traditionally authoritative, predominantly White perspective (CBS News), though notably considerate in showcasing student voices, with voices of community members who recall the walkout. Roberto shares his experiences:

Roberto: All the signs were there. And then, when the people from Crystal City came down and formally organized the students and gave them the push they needed, that's when the walkout occurred. . . . La Raza Unida, José Angel Gutiérrez. That's where it all started, and then it spread down here. . . .

It was inevitable. It was bound to happen because of the policies that were in place against speaking Spanish, the labeling of students; what the criteria was for labeling somebody a troublemaker, somebody a future dropout, somebody a future doctor or lawyer, I don't know. But it was definitely there.

While Roberto had graduated just before the 1968 walkout, Humberto was recruited by organizers from Crystal City, and became a central figure in the events that unfolded. Here he describes his experience of transformation, and education:

They said "Humberto we'll give you a ride home. There's something we want to talk to you about." And, so we did. And we got in the car. . . . There was a couple other guys in the car from Crystal City. One of them was José Angel Gutiérrez and the other was Narciso Aleman. And they said that they wanted to visit with me some more. They had

long hair. They had something to propose to me that I might be interested in. And they wanted to talk to some of the so-called leaders in the school.

There was an old church. An old white church. And there was a belfry upstairs, like a little office area. And that's where we met. And there was some tables and chairs. And then these guys were there and they asked me some questions like, "What is it that I want to do?" . . .

Well, anyway, we would meet about three times, sometimes four times a week at that church. And then there was one time that I remember being up there and there was people that I did not recognize. And there was about maybe ten people there more that I did not recognize. One of them that was there was from Nicaragua. And there was a couple of Black guys and they were wearing berets, black berets. And there was a couple of other Chicanos and they were wearing brown berets. And then there was one Puerto Rican and a couple of White guys. A White guy and a girl.

They had long hair. They must have been an average of 23, 25, 26 years old. They were talking about violent overthrowing, that we need to do this. We need to overthrow the government, the government needs to wake up, the people need to wake up. We can't be doing what we're doing overseas, policing the world. When talking about democracy in other countries, to other countries, and patronizing them, could be in using condescending attitudes, when we have all this racism and discrimination here at home. All these barriers to voting. . . .

Things were moving rapidly, and then the word got out that there were some rumors and rumblings in the community of a movement, where the 'natives' are restless.

> Word got out in the school that this was a movement that was starting within the student body. I was approached by the principal, Mr. P—, at the time.
>
> He said, "Humberto, I hear that there are some rumblings, some dissatisfied students, and that talking about some really dreadful thoughts. That perhaps there may be a walkout or that there are demonstrations, and your name keeps popping up." I said, "Well, this is what school is for." I said, "I understand it's a venue for exchange of thoughts, and philosophies, and discussions on the issues. At least, that's what I understand."

While Hispanic board members and classmates who attended school during this time saw the escalating tensions as inevitable, Bob was surprised:

> Personally I was surprised at the walkout. Because some of those, the leaders of that movement, were in school with me. I never knew there was problem with them. We were always good friends. And I was very surprised at some of the people who led that walkout.
>
> Well, all I know is what those who organized . . . and led the walkout [said]. They didn't like the fact, apparently at least that's what they said, that they were not allowed to speak Spanish on the school ground. That was one of their main gripes or concerns. And really other than that, I'm not really aware of any other legitimate, and you could argue maybe whether or not that was a legitimate concern.

Iris, whose husband was appointed to the school board just prior to the nationally-noted walkout, did not mention the incident in her oral history, except for when prompted. For this reason, it did not seem appropriate to insert it into her introductory narrative; however, now

follows a very interesting perspective on the topic:

> I mean, it went so fast. It didn't seem like it lasted that long, you know, but when you read about it ... it's people that don't know the nature, or the why . . .. They'll probably tell you, "Why did you have to do this. What point were you trying to get across?" I mean, [our] kids, I don't know if they've ever been told . . .. I don't think we've really sat down and talked about, you know, this situation that was here. I mean, they remember when their dad was in the school board. . . .
>
> In fact, [my husband's] sister walked out, and she came and told my mother-in-law, "This is happening." And my mother-in-law told her, "Don't you dare step out of that." And my husband was like, "Uh, we'll talk about it later." . . . But [his sister] walked out. She walked out.
>
> This kid needed to go to school. They couldn't stay out of school. And so one gentleman here in Paredes had a bus that he used to carry or transport field workers. They approached him, "Can we borrow your bus if we can find a school where the kids can go?" Well they asked several districts, of course they didn't want to get involved. They give them the runaround until, I think, [L— ISD] was the one that accepted them. . . . I think most of the kids were expelled. I think she went back [in] about two days. She didn't stay out of school that long. . . . But even for those few days, they still wanted to make the point that they were going to be in school if they could. . . .
>
> They cared about their education and had things that they saw were not right or wanted more of than what they were getting. And so that's how it came about, but not that they didn't care. Their plans were to get educated all the time, and they were going to

do it somehow or another, even if they were going to be suspended from school. And a couple of days that they were not in school, they were going to miss that, but no, their point was to make their education and to make it better.

Since her husband was on the board, I asked Iris if he received any pressure from the community, one way or another, about the walkout? She said yes:

> Oh yes. A lot. A lot of pressure. I mean you had families like, "What's gonna' happen? What's gonna' happen with my kid?" He tried as much or as best as he could to make them understand: "this is going to make a lot of difference in school district, it is going to make a difference to a lot of students. It's going to be okay, you know. Yes, you're worried, but eventually, they're going to get educated. It's not going to be like, they're going to be expelled forever. No. They're trying to make a point, they're trying to get it better, I think, for those kids that are, you know, in the lower grades, and you should be proud." You know, some people didn't agree with him, but he always [thought first], that it's something they (student organizers) feel, and they feel it's the right time to do it, you know, if they wait any longer maybe it won't happen, and this was the right time to do it. So, yes, he did have pressure from the families.

White flight and industrial decline. There were differing perspectives around the decline of the Anglo population, and whether the drivers of the "exodus" of Anglos were primarily economic or political. Additionally, there were multiple descriptions regarding the decline of industry in the APISD, operating across multiple timelines, including post-WWII and post-1968/walkout. As well, it is important to note the position in this ethnography that the departure of individual or even large groups of Anglos/Whites, does not guarantee the departure

of the corresponding Anglo/White *AOEM*. *Whiteness remains*. Bob, an Anglo, saw the population decline as exclusively driven by a loss of economic demand. Roberto, by contrast believed it was directly related to the rise of the Hispanic political majority:

> Roberto: the mass exodus was very, very noticeable. . . . There was a massive exodus of Anglos from the community once the Mexicans took over the elected positions. The only ones that stayed behind were the big farmers because the land they couldn't take with them.

Here's Bob's take:

> Michael: I feel like there's a lot less Anglo families today than there were in '60 and '70?
>
> Bob: Yeah, very few. We're the serious minority anymore. Especially in these communities.
>
> Michael: And so what happened, if the business had already started scaling down by '60. That was well before the walkout.
>
> Bob: The younger ones ... people basically starting with my age group, maybe even some before that. . . . A lot of them got college educations and they didn't want to come here. They didn't want to stay here. They went to Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, Austin, all over the country, you know. . . . They knew that there was not a lot of opportunity here for them.
>
> Michael: I imagine some people were moving on because business was dying down?
>
> Bob: Yeah, probably the majority.

Michael: I mean if you had the railroads, which then eventually got torn up. If you had the rail roads and you had the opportunity to grow produce, what caused the die down [in population]?

Bob: After World War II, there was a big decrease in demand for products like that and that's where the downfall began, right there, almost immediately when the war was over. And that's what basically put [the packing sheds] that business out. There was still some vegetables growing in the area and processed other places. I used to grow vegetables myself. There were no sheds here. I sent mine to Edinburg.

While technically Bob is accurate in describing Anglos as constituting less than a majority of the population, and now a low single-digit percentage of the APISD population, overall it seems his sense of being a "serious minority" might involve more than just numbers. With respect to the specific causes of loss of industry and White flight, there are no authoritative records I discovered on the topic, and so it would require a comprehensive search for individual business records, past owners and workers, and an attempt to speak with a significant number of the Anglos who actually left.

A similar explanation is provided in the dissertation (2003) by Llano Grande founder "Lauro," whose research is rooted in a set of additional oral histories, and adds natural disasters and mechanization as additional drivers of economic decline. Lauro finds:

Natural disasters such as the freezes of the late 1940s and early 1950s and the prolonged droughts help explain the circumstance. In addition, the economic shift from manual labor to mechanization of the 1950s that caused an impact on the regional economy; and the exodus of Anglos from the community following the economic downturns and the

historic high school walkout of 1968 also explain the departure of wealth and the consequent existence of economic impoverishment in the area. (p. 22)

Iris, similar to Bob, related the population shifts primarily to industry, specifically the closure of a Texas Plastics plant, but in this case a number of years after the walkout (post-1968):

> Iris: To be honest with you, I really don't know. when Texas Plastics closed there was a lot of layoffs. They had three shifts at Texas Plastics, from 7 [am] until 3, 3 to 11, and 11 to 7 [am]. It was 24/7. I'm assuming at least a hundred people worked in each shift. You had all kinds of people that worked. You had the restaurants that people went to eat. I mean, [Texas Plastics closing] really impacted the [APISD] area, not only Paredes, but the [APISD] area, I believe. I've heard people say that people from [a nearby city] came, from [another nearby city], from North Town, but the closing I'm not really very familiar with it. . . . I think things went down at that point, at that time. The town just gave up or something, but you know— And then we were never able to get up again. Giving people jobs or getting something to come in to the city. I mean everybody has to be working out-of-town. Most that don't work in school or the city have to go out-of-town and work.
>
> Paredes and Américo are really different than what they were before. These little towns were booming with work. People had jobs. Right now, I think our main workforce place is the school, and the city. It's really sad, because we have all of these empty areas that could be used for something. Right here across from McDonald's, H-E-B [the grocery store] is closed. We're very happy we have another H-E-B, a new H-E-B. Across the street to the west, there's an empty building. We have some other little buildings that went up and are occupied, but these places were, people were there, people were

> shopping. It's really changed. Américo has so many places that— they don't even have a gas station. Simply, you don't have a gas station where people can gas up. H-E-B is close by and serves as a grocery store and everything else that, a gas station and stuff. But things have changed dramatically in every way.

Ironically, where schooling was effective in producing college graduates, including for Hispanic APISD residents, the intended effect might have been to worsen the 'brain drain' and exodus of valuable social capital from the area, a trend that continues to this day, and which Lauro describes effectively in his dissertation (2003):

> Students who performed well in local schools typically attended college and subsequently sought employment opportunities outside the region, and as jobs became more scarce in rural south Texas, few skilled youths opted to stay in the area because of a lack of opportunity. (p. 37)

As a bittersweet silver lining, the decline of industry inherently invalidates the *patrón* system, detailed in a later section, since there are no legions of workers whose political support is implicit. Whether the decline of the *patrón* system drove the decline in industry, however, is not clear. Is it the proverbial chicken or the egg? Regardless, the *politiquera* system became the beneficiary, since an increasing amount of economic power was placed in the hands of board members, as the school district emerged as far and away the largest employer. School districts are the major employer for many of the communities in the Rio Grande Valley that lie outside the handful of mid-sized cities. We will explore these effects as well, in later sections.

Migrant students' experiences. As Roberto and other participants express, migrant farm work is a common feature of the historical and contemporary educational experience at

APISD. Teachers and parents of the current generation of schoolchildren often invoke "working in the fields" as both a reminder of the hard work that provided for students' wellbeing, and also as a warning against poor behavior and academic failure. In this way, "the fields" may stand in for the (White) middle-class bogeyman, the 'McDonalds fast-food server.' As a point of fact, many families still participate in seasonal migrant work.

APISD students who are classified as migrants may often enroll late in the year, sometimes after *picture day*, the state-defined period which designates who will and will not be included in high-stakes test accountability. Migrant students who are not in attendance by picture day may be less likely to receive significant attention from teachers, even when they are enrolled in schools at home, since their scores 'don't count.' Generally migrant families are both part of and apart from the school community, as a consequence of these differences.

Roberto describes his experiences as a migrant student:

> My parents, since they were illiterate, realized the value of an education, and they decided to make every sacrifice to make sure that we went to school, to the point that my uncles would ridicule my father for sending us to school, because all of my cousins didn't get to go to school. They went to school as long as they were mandated by law to go to school, but as soon as they turned 16, they dropped off from the second grade or third grade. They were way behind, because we would get pulled out of school, so we could migrate up north, whether it was West Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Montana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio. Wherever the crops were, that's where the entire family would migrate as a unit.

> My oldest uncle was the *troquero*. He was the general contractor. He negotiated with the farmers and he provided the labor, which was the family. He provided the trucks to transport the family up north, so we would pile in to the back of a truck and that's how we got to wherever the crops were at.

Humberto also described the *troquero*:

> But we always dealt with the *troqueros*, the contractor. The people that would pick us up and take us home from the fields. And we never really saw the farmer, the owner of the property that we were working on, the fields that we were working on.

Historically, migrant families were tied each growing season to the *troquero*, a term derived from the English word "truck" that was first introduced to me by Roberto. Further research finds some literature exploring both the concept, and the resulting relationships. As Valdés (1991) discusses:

> The *troquero* system of the 1930s was a response not only to the availability of trucks, but also to changes in the organization of field labor working units. The *Mexicanos* of the earlier period came almost exclusively from small, separate, nuclear family units. They traveled by train with dozens of other families, most of whom were strangers. The Texas-Mexican crews by contrast, commonly were composed of several households of adult brothers, sisters, cousins, and their children. They, traveled, worked, and lived in close proximity. Even when not related, crews often came from the same town . . . so that workers were likely to be in the company of familiar people. . . . Workers paid the *troquero* a registration fee ranging from nine dollars to fifteen dollars one way, with children under fourteen paying half fare. . . . The most common means of transportation

to the North was in open-stake trucks ranging in size from one to two tons.

> Often used to haul livestock, these vehicles commonly carried between twenty-five and fifty people on the journey. In the truck each family carved out a space for its members and for food, clothing, and equipment. . . . The distance one way varied from sixteen hundred to two thousand miles and typically required two or three days and nights of solid driving. . . . The trucks drove nonstop except when circumstances prevented them, with two drivers generally sharing duties so there would be no need to rest. (pp. 54-55)

For Rey, it took a unique level of dedication to overcome the obstacles posed by migration, and to graduate high school, an outcome which eluded his 13 sisters. Here is an exchange between Faith, Rey, and I:

> Faith: Tell your story, Dad. Tell your story why you think you finished high school. Because what happened when you would migrate?
>
> Rey: Oh, yeah. When I was growing up, this was very young, and I would always—when I'd see that bus go by, that yellow bus, man, I'd go after it. . . . Anywhere and everywhere. I would go after that bus and ask, "Hey, man, how do I get in there?" [He said], "Well, you go to school." And as I started growing up, I'd still follow that bus, and eventually, everybody that I knew would drop out from following that bus. And I kept following and I kept following, and finally I got there, second grade. I was following it, and we got to the point, we went to migrate. And in the migration, working, and I would still come back in early September so I could start school, because I loved it. I loved it.

"Yeah, I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna do it," [and] sure did. . . . Finally, after trying so hard, it paid off. I graduated in '74.

Faith: Because back then, they wouldn't pay you bonuses until October, so the migrants had to stay over there. . . . And the bonuses were pretty chunky.

Rey: In any event, I would go back to school and I would stay with somebody, and my mother would pay them, and give me the money so I could have spending money. And the lady would have me— what is it? Room and boards.

Faith: All his sisters; none of them made it. . . . your sisters didn't make it, because back then it was okay to drop out, and your sisters got married, what? In the seventh, eighth grade? Because they were migrants.

See, and when they went to Florida, because they all stayed in Florida, they got married at very young ages, 15, 16. Right, Dad? Maggie was how old then, 14?

Rey: She was 14.

However, even in more modern decades, the migrant population still faces discrimination and segregation, both implicit and explicit. In one case, it seems that Glory unconsciously grouped 'teaching migrant students' with a variety of other forms of harassment suffered at the hands of an abusive superintendent and administration:

Harassment, a lot of harassment. . . . Oh, I got transferred, of course. They put me in the migrant or the Spanish speaking class, teaching English to the non-English speakers in a little room.

However, not all the differences in experiences for migrant students were described in a negative light. Humberto describes the process of witnessing Northern cities struggling to cope with increasing demands for equality during the civil rights movement:

> So we would go up on the migrant trail and drive through these cities and there were times when we would see the smoke billowing on the horizon. And then we actually had to reroute because there were riots, and there was protesting and demonstrations on the highway that we would take going through town. There were no freeways.
>
> So that's the first time I saw, got an inkling as to democracy at work, if you want to. I had no idea what that was. But people were expressing their views, freedom of constitutional right to expression.
>
> Okay? First amendment. And then we'd come back. As a matter of fact when I was on the migrant trail, that was the first time I saw a Black person, up North.
>
> I said, "Wow. That's another world." And I kind of realized that it was a big world out there from what I was used to because we didn't leave our neighborhood, our *barrio*, as children. No mass transit, no public transit, transportation system. So our life was just going to school and coming back, going to school and going back, and that was it until we became migrants. Okay?

In addition to witnessing "democracy at work," Humberto was introduced to new racial minorities, and gained an expanded awareness of the scale of the world. While I have not explored this notion academically, I believe personally that no amount of abstract or virtual study of geography and regional/global cultures can match the power of actual travel, physically mapping the world to your experience. Yet, it never occurred to me before that migrant students

have this advantage over other young people in APISD, several of whom revealed to me during a field trip to a movie theater 14 miles away— that this was the farthest they had ever traveled.

For another perspective, while Bob did not consider himself a migrant, he did discuss his family's migration to the Américo-Paredes area during the Great Depression:

> So they all migrated down here.
>
> [The family] owned [the property on Mile 15] for several years and finally lost it to taxes, which happened to a lot of people back then. Lots of properties were lost to tax. Right after the Depression and it was hard, hard to make a living, make money.
>
> You could make enough to live because you could produce your own pork, and eggs, milk, and certain vegetables and everything like to subsist. They did, they knew how to do all that, and they did very well at it. But anyway, there was no money, so without money they couldn't pay the taxes and the government wound up taking it over.

Female board members' subtle dissent. Neither Glory nor Iris discussed the walkout, racism, discrimination, or segregation without specific prompting. When the conversation was raised, they seemed reluctant to assert that systemic abuse was prominent, or had an impact on their experiences. Not that they deny the claims made by others, but described their own experiences as noticeably different.

> Glory: When I went to school there were a lot of Anglos. . . . I got along just fine with them. At the ranch where I grew up, my dad was one of the foreman. There was an Anglo foreman and my dad was a Hispanic. And so they each had their jobs to do. Well, I said, "Lucky for me." Mr. K— (the Anglo foreman) had a daughter that was just a year older than me. So we got along just fine. We rode the bus together to school. Even

through high school, we still were good friends. And really good friends. We didn't see as though she's the *gringa* and I'm the Mexican or whatever.

I knew the problems over there and I could see the problems, I just didn't have 'em. . . . Now, if you ask my husband about any [problems], he had 'em. But he's kinda' radical anyway. . . . [Teachers would] take off their belt and, you know, spank someone or something like that. . . . The paddling, yes. If you spoke Spanish. You were caught talking in Spanish. That was one of the big rules, you couldn't speak Spanish in the classroom or out in the playground. That's the main thing that I remember. And, of course at the time, I didn't see anything wrong with it, you know? Growing up in the elementary, I spoke English anyway. I had older sisters so when I started school, I guess that's why I got ahead 'cause I could write my name and it's a long name. . . .

And, you know, I spoke English. The neighbor was an Anglo girl and we grew up together and so, I learned the English language, I didn't have that problem. But I could see it in others. I could see it around me. But . . . truth— you really don't see it.

Glory then recalls a time much later on we she and D— her Anglo friend were looking at yearbooks and talking about race:

Glory: D—, were there any Hispanics in your class when you were in school?

D—: Oh no, there weren't any.

Glory: [looking at a yearbook] "Perez, Rodriguez, Ramos … Diane, I thought you said you didn't have any Hispanics in your school? What's this? Ramos, Rodriguez, Perez ...?"

D—: Oh!

Glory: See, she didn't see it. She didn't see it either. To her, everybody was the same. And that's the [same] with me. To me everybody was the same, I didn't see any difference. . . .

I asked Iris whether she felt like there was discrimination or racism in school? "Was it present? Was it something you felt when you were in the school system as a student?" Her answer explains why she felt apart from the movement for change, and might account for the structured silence, her choice not to address the walkout prior to my prompting:

No, the most that I saw was just a little [makes swatting gesture] you know, with maybe a ruler. A little pat on the hand with a ruler. But, as far as, spank, I never got spanked in school. In fact, I don't think my parents ever spanked me. Now my sister did because she was quite a character. But I don't think I ever got spanked at school. My only brother was older. He was the oldest of the family. And he was very calm. I don't think he ever got spanked at school either. But then I guess that was the way we were raised. My parents were that way. My grandparents were that way. I mean it was just the way we were raised. . . . But there was some kids that really, really— I know one teacher had a paddle that had like little holes. And one little boy one time, this was in like maybe the fifth grade, really got it. And he didn't come to school the next day. And I think, I believe if I remember his dad went by the office to complain.

Interestingly enough, Glory and Iris' perceptions and experiences lie somewhere between those of Bob's who also "didn't see any difference" and those of Hispanic board members and classmates who both saw and felt- literally with swats- the differences inherent in a racist, segregating system of schooling. While Rey said he didn't experience discrimination, he was

swatted often, and his 13 sisters did not graduate as a consequence of migration, and their teenage marriages to men they met as migrants. Perhaps differences in outcomes rooted in race can masquerade themselves as 'circumstances and conditions' whereas discrimination is commonly associated with malicious intent from oppressive individuals, or organized groups.

From the *Patrón* to the *Politiquera* System

In describing the political systems that predominated for both Anglos (pre-1968) and Hispanics (post-1968), I have adopted the language of APISD and my participants/friends. The details of each system, *patrón* to *politiquera*, will become clear as each voice is shared.

Initially, I utilized the masculine form of Spanish, and wrote *politiquero*. In my transcripts, this form may/may not have been predominant, as pronunciation flavors the word similarly in conversation. However, as I reflected on the actual *politiqueras* as people, also called *runners*, who are paid during elections to bring voters to the polls, I realized that many were women, and so the feminine ending seems more appropriate.

In an interesting twist, from *patrón* (masculine) to *politiquera* (feminine) implies a shift in power between genders, though the female *politiqueras* operate out of sight and do not share the stage with the predominantly male candidates whose elections they ensure. This means, quite literally, behind these 'great' and influential men, are many hardworking women. As well, the shift in gender, when applied to online searches, uncovered a small but important set of articles in the press verifying some of the practices common for *politiqueras* in present-day RGV/APISD. My use of this term, therefore, aligns with what meager extant literature exists (Garza, 2008; Rombough & Keithly, 2010).

***Patróns* oversee a colonial empire.** Lauro, the founder of Llano Grande, touches on a good definition of the *patrón* system when he shares the story of José:

> Mexican children were taught just enough English to understand their *patrónes* (bosses). "We rarely made it out of grammar school," he said. Americo-Paredes school policy created a segregated system that reflected the values of the ruling power. A group of Anglo farmers founded the school system as an effective vehicle through which the economic, political, and social status quo could be perpetuated . . . enabling them to retain power. (Lauro, 2003, p. 136)

Even more troubling was the history of the land the Anglo farmers claimed. As Quito describes in his doctoral dissertation (2014):

> Mexico almost overnight became a part of the United States via westward expansion including the annexation of Texas from Mexico and the subsequent U.S.-Mexico War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 . . .. These series of events displaced countless Mexicans; making them foreigners in the homeland . . .. On paper the Treaty assured the displaced the same opportunities and rights afforded all U.S. citizens, but in practice the new Americans were stripped of their lands, provided inadequate education, and afforded few economic opportunities by the controlling Anglos. (p. 5)

Additional sources on this silenced history include Acuña (1988), Lauro et al. (2004), Montejano (1987), Richardson (1999), and San Miguel (1988). Roberto adds to this formal history and shares his perspective on the early Anglo/White *patrón* system:

> The White administration didn't have to play these little games because they were all members of the ruling class. They had their farmlands, they had their businesses. They

were set. They were not tempted by job offers. They were not tempted by the usual things that politicians are tempted with. It was a different time and they were set, financially. . . . And they didn't have to worry about getting votes because they would tell their workers how to vote. . . . "You want to keep your job, you vote for me." And that's how it worked.

Bob had a different perspective of the original, predominantly Anglo board members, and the system of education these "professional people" oversaw:

Oh, it was great. I think we all thought so. It was a very, very good school system, well run, good administrators, excellent teachers, the Board no doubt was a strong and a totally united Board, mostly Anglo, though it was not exclusively. The first Mexican-American that I remember being elected to the school board was J— Sr., and I can't tell you just what year, but I think that would've been probably in the mid '50s. And later, M—, whom you know, [my Uncle's] father-in-law. Yeah, a fine gentleman, M—, and so was well known for that matter; successful people that were highly respected. Period. It didn't make any difference that they were Mexican-American or Anglo-American, nobody thought anything about it.

Michael: It seems like a lot of the folks from the early Board were business owners, or—

Bob: Almost all of them were. If not all, 100% probably were professional people.

Michael: Now, board members who were business owners . . ., a lot of times they could count, without even [having] to probably ask, on their employees to support them in their bid. You know, if you have a reputation, if you have a lot of people—

Bob: Yeah, the employees to some extent, but mostly their friends. . . .

Certainly it is not true as Bob asserts that "we all" thought the education system was great, and that "nobody thought anything" about the differences between Anglos and Hispanics, in terms of school board leadership. He may be speaking on behalf of 'his group' again, Anglos. Furthermore, Bob demurs when asked if a business owner could rely on their employees to support them in the ballot box, shutting down discussion of a Patrón system. However, Lauro shares in his dissertation (2003) the oral history of William, an Anglo elder, who felt comfortable sharing a less rosy truth:

> We came to buy land, to manage the sheds, and to run the schools...yeah, some of us White folks were poor, but there was no question who was in control of the politics and of the jobs (p. 120)

Chris, a Hispanic board member from my study, was also candid about systemic oppression in our conversation:

> Michael: You're talking about the *patrón* system. Tell me a little bit more about your understanding of that?
>
> Chris: I think a lot of the Anglos . . . relied on it. . . . Américo Paredes' book came up, "With a pistol in his hand," I believe? (Paredes, 1958) You have a lot of these guys like the Duke of Duval (county), a few guys that work during the civil rights era, the LBJ era, a little before that. [They] were political bosses and they were able to control a large number of maybe subordinates, employees, people that were— that went to these individuals for help.
>
> In Anglo South Texas, a lot of the workers, a lot of the guys with money, the *patróns*, the bosses, like Mr. Américo (Anglo surname), this guy over here from down the

road. They were the land owners, they were the bosses. They had a large bond in these minority Mexican laborers, relied on these individuals.

One issue is the nutrition. The food they were giving the students, especially the milk. Mr. G— was a dairy farmer here. He had a dairy here. He had a contract with the school for at least a decade, or 20 years to buy all this milk from his cows, so he would produce the milk, sell it to the school district, and that's what the kids drank. I heard that one of the reasons why they started revolting in the walkout, accumulated in the walkout, was they were finding pieces of lead and metal inside the milk itself. They were forcing them to drink it; they (board members) didn't want to change it.

In the larger macro-political view, APISD Hispanics, or Mexican Americans throughout the former Mesoamerica have been regarded as a captive labor force, a resource to be deployed strategically during times of (agricultural) labor shortage, and then withdrawn to the extent possible, by force if necessary. This cycle is captured in great quantitative and qualitative detail by García (1980), who documents the impact of the "Bracero Program" which formally organized the recruitment of field workers to come into the U.S. from Mexico to compensate for labor shortages prior to World War II. However, even after World War II, the Bracero Program resulted in 4.4 million workers brought into the U.S. from 1951-1964 (García, p. 42).

García describes the Rio Grande Valley as constituting more of a "colonial empire" (1980, p. 206) during this time, in which the positive aspects of the Bracero Program—for example, contracts offering guaranteed rates for wages, and protections against discrimination—were disregarded by "influential growers" who preferred leveraging their unequal power relations to extract better terms from "wetbacks" who were "illegal" (p. 207).

When federal policy actors determined it necessary to reverse the influx of "illegal" laborers from Mexico, the explicitly racist "Operation Wetback" ensued, which in July, 1954 in the Rio Grande Valley resulted in about 42,000 apprehensions and nearly 20,000 deportations through faraway El Paso in the first 15 days (García, 1980, p. 212). This was coupled with an exodus of 50,000 individuals who proactively streamed past nearby border crossings (Hill, 1954). "Operation Wetback" did have a partial effect of increasing legal labor contracts through the Bracero Program, but the landowners resisted the federal policy, including through the use of local media, which portrayed the Border Patrol as an "army of occupation" and an "invading horde" (p. 214). As Hill (1954) explains, many Rio Grande Valley residents:

> [They] assert baldly that this 3,000-square-mile agricultural empire, with 300,000 inhabitants and an annual income of more than $300,000,000, was built on cheap "wetback" labor and—like the Southern slave owners of a century ago—it is a violation of their rights to take it away, even if the "wetbacks" are lawbreakers. (p. 8)

Lauro, the founder of the Llano Grande center, finds in one powerful oral history, a member of the APISD community who came to the conclusion that educational inequality for Hispanic youth was intentionally designed to keep Mexican Americans dependent on the agricultural business that empowered *patrónes*. As Lauro (2003) shares, the story of Adán:

> "They said at the school that we were held back two or three times in the first grade because we hadn't learned English well enough," he said. "But that's not the truth. I think they held us back so that we'd drop out and go work in the fields...where they really wanted us," he continued. "What kid would feel good being in the first grade at the age of

10 or 11," he asked rhetorically, "with a full moustache and already looking like a grown man?" (p. 30)

According to Roberto, even early Hispanic board members tended to share some of the characteristics of White business owners, exemplifying characteristics of the *patrón* system

> Roberto: [Now, on the board] we had people like J— (a Hispanic), who was a successful farmer. He saw himself as a member of the ruling class. He saw himself as the person of reason. He saw himself as the establishment. . . . *patrón* is a little harsh. . . . Patrón, okay? The old *patrón* system. He was left over from the old system even though he was Hispanic.

However, it is important to note that a person's status with respect to the community is often contested. In a prior oral history gathered through the Llano Grande Center, and shared in Lauro et al. (2004), we hear from the daughter of the same Hispanic school board member Roberto associated with the *patrón* system:

> When J— and E— gained seats on the School Board in the 1950s, they too contested the status quo (of racist schooling). Blanca recalls her father telling her a story about a highly charged debate held at a board meeting regarding the inferior conditions the North Américo Elementary School. When one Anglo board member argued that the facilities at the Mexican American school were tolerable, Mr. J— whipped back, "If the school is as good as you say, why don't you send your daughters there?" (p. 513)

As new, less wealthy Hispanics ran for office, like Iris's husband, they faced a climate of fear and intimidation that was a legacy of the *patrón* system. Iris shares:

> There was not much (voter) participation and it's sad because we want a change but yet, you know, people were scared. I think they were intimidated, I think that people said, "Well, if they see me there or they see me go, I don't know what can happen."

Iris clarified that people feared the might lose their jobs if their Anglo employers found out who they were voting for. To overcome the effects of the Patrón system, and to usher in an era of Mexican American political power required an investment in organizing that drew upon the creativity and sparse resources of the community. Iris describes these early efforts with a sense of nostalgia:

> You had, he and his friends making billboards. . . . They would buy a plywood, a thin, quarter-inch plywood, and make their signs, make their names, make their whatever they wanted on their signs. And here they were. Nights after work, cutting out with a jigsaw, all these letters for their four by eight signs. Maybe, 10, 15, no more than 20 signs went up, at that time. I mean, it was, just maybe, a couple of ... on [one state highway] and maybe on [another state highway], one or two. . . . Not anything like you see today.
>
> [The money] it came from their pockets. . . . Or maybe a friend that would donate a plywood or two. . . . That was basically it. Donations were very scarce. Very scarce. We would make chicken barbecues. We would make raffles. We would do any kind of fundraiser that we could to get in a couple of hundred dollars. And a hundred dollars is a lot then. It went a long way. And of course, election day comes, and ... oh, they would use their bullhorns. Or had like, what do you call these things? You put on top of the car and you- . . . Go around ... Yeah. A loudspeaker. And they would go around town a couple of weekends before the election. . . . [On] election day, . . . by then, you talk to a

couple of volunteers, a couple of people that said, "Hey, what can I help you with?" and we would basically tell them, "Bring your friends, bring your relatives, try to get as many votes and encourage people to vote."

Chris picks up this thread to share his understanding, based on the decades of stories received from his elders in the political community:

> They got people active. They got their constituents active. They got people motivated. They established an identity. You're from APISD, you're a [parakeet], you're a Mexican-American from APISD. We had just gone through segregation. I can imagine the folks on the north side of the railroad tracks, the Mexican-Americans that lived on the north side of the railroad tracks, what they were going through at this time. To understand these folks, these students. . . .
>
> Looking at this identity, they want to take ownership and they get one city commissioner, they get two, they get three. Now everybody full blown revolts on them. Mexican-Americans are coming into control of the school district, Anglos are being pushed out. [Mexican-Americans] didn't reinvent the wheel, they were just using the same tactics on their folks. Getting people motivated, getting people registered to vote, getting people to vote. That's how the power came.

A New Majority Rules Absolutely. Several of the oral histories / *testimonios* touched on politics in transition, as grassroots organizing for Hispanic seekers of political office, and a popular uprising in the 1968 walkout, disrupted the *patrón* system and paved the way for a system with new faces, if not immediately new structures. Here are a few reactions to changes in the political climate:

Chris: I think what occurred is when [Anglos] lost power, you know, after the civil rights, because in some places they stayed sharing land, but focusing on APISD, they pretty much used the same system. These Hispanic leaders they went and they didn't have to reinvent the wheel. They went in and they were using the same tactics, but they used it to blanket the majority, which was the Mexican-American population.

Roberto: After years, and years, and years of prohibiting Spanish and labeling these individuals that were proud of their Hispanic culture as troublemakers and potential dropouts it was ingrained. It was part of the way of thinking. Then we went the other extreme with this new group. "Let's get rid of all the gringos. Get rid of all of the policies. Let's bring in the new way of thinking." One extreme or the other. There was no middle ground, and that's where I found myself all the time right in the middle.

One of the pieces of academic work closest to these conversations in APISD—close in spirit, culture, methodology, chronology, and geography—is *From Peones to Politicos* by Foley et al. (1988). However, this ethnographic text, which explores a South Texas culture between the (lower) Rio Grande Valley and San Antonio, spends less time focused exclusively on the local systems of schooling, and does not emphasize school board members over a broader political class.

However, there was a documented split between "moderate" and "radical" *Mexicanos*. Foley et al. describe both factions as "indistinguishable in terms of class, ethnic, and language differences" (p. 98). Yet the radicals called out moderates for "becoming too Anglo" (p.98), which resembles Roberto's clash with the *Hispanic hotheads*. All are noted as being "fiercely loyal to America," which echoes Roberto's references to patriotism among APISD Hispanics.

In a way, Roberto's analysis, serving right in the middle of a divided board, starts to sound like Bob's interpretation, with one major caveat, as we will explore. Here is Bob in his own words:

> The majority on the board switched from Anglo-American to Mexican-American. And I remember that fairly well. That was after I had come back from the Army . . .. The school walkout was '68, if I'm not mistaken. . . . That was about the time that the structure of the board, ethnic structure began to change. . . .
>
> It became political. In the past, prior to that . . . time frame, it was non-political. Yes, there were occasionally, in a school board election, same with the city commission and mayor races, there would be someone else, opposition. But it was generally Anglo versus Anglo. . . . [And] it was amicable. It wasn't the serious infighting as it seems to be this day and time.

While Roberto would seem to agree that there was significant infighting, he would definitely not describe the Anglo's *patrón* system as "non-political." It should not seem to require stating that holders of elective office, who wield power over a system affecting many families lives, are by very definition political. Yet it's possible that prior fear, intimidation, and explicit laws denying Hispanics the vote might have allowed Anglos to manage the structures of power with less volatility.

> Bob: Here's basically what happened [in the walkout]. The Mexican-American community for the most part all united, I say all, I don't mean 100%, but the great majority, they united to vote for and elect the Hispanic majorities as opposed to what had traditionally in the past been the Anglo majority. Almost immediately after they

accomplished that, they split into at least two separate factions, and the political infighting began between those factions. It's there to this day. It's never left.

I have occasionally, not often, Mexican-American friends, which the great majority of my friends anymore are Mexican-American. I consider them my best friends. I'm sincere about that, and they feel the same way about me. These people, like I say, they united in order to get the control that they thought they wanted, but then they split, and they started infighting. I have people to this day that occasionally would come up to me, I'm talking about mostly people of my age group and say, "You know I remember back . . . when the Anglos, with the majority in control of the cities, and we didn't have all these infighting problems." It's true. We didn't have, we did not have it.

I think what it really boiled down to was in the past before that, generally speaking, the Mexican American population, even though they may have been by number numeric majority, when it come time to vote they didn't go vote probably like most of the Anglo people did. So, in an election they didn't necessarily elect Mexican American candidates. But after that (1968 walkout), that's about the time that it changed, that they did (vote in large numbers).

And I really, this is my personal opinion, others might disagree, and that's fine, but I think they just recognized that they actually did have a majority. And if they exercised their rights to vote that they could elect whoever they wanted, and they wanted to elect their own people. Which they did. And they still do, for that matter, concerning the school board. There's not one Anglo-American on the board.

> I can't even remember who the last one was, tell you the truth, I really don't know. That's beside the point. I have no problem with the right kind of people— I don't care whether they're Mexican-American, or Anglo, or Chinese, or what the hell. Red, yellow, green, don't make no difference to me, as long as they're qualified and dedicated to the betterment of the district.
>
> To me that's why you should run and be elected. I don't think that's necessarily the case this day and time; its politics. It's people wanting control over others. And in recent years we've had some serious problems up here in our district because of that.

***Politiqueras*' exploitation of voting procedures.** In a relatively recent article by the New York Times (Fernandez, 2014), which deploys deprecating language to describe a local town, the author explores the role played by some *politiqueras* in securing RGV elections by pushing and exceeding the limits of legal voter assistance:

> In this Rio Grande Valley town of trailer parks and weedy lots eight miles from the Mexico border, people call them runners or *politiqueras* (emphasis added)— the campaign workers who use their network of relatives and friends to deliver votes for their candidates. They travel around town with binders stuffed with the names and addresses of registered voters, driving residents to and from the polls and urging those they bump into at the grocery store to support their candidates.
>
> Three women working as *politiqueras* in the 2012 elections . . . were arrested by F.B.I. agents in December and accused of giving residents cash, drugs, beer and cigarettes in exchange for their votes.

As I explore in this section, the full transition in systems from *patrón* to *politiquera* was gradual yet clearly defined by a series of efforts to elevate competition to a new high, and to exploit every possible advantage in voting procedures, to secure a win. Chris elaborates:

> Chris: It's strange though. You want to start really thinking about it. From my experience, it's not necessarily anymore the *patrón* system. It's kind of moved in a weird way, because the power lies with these politically motivated *runners*. Those are the guys that dictate the election. . . . You and I can put our name on a ballot and be like, "You know what, I'm running for office. I'm going to come up with an honest platform." But without a runner, somebody who has the connection to the streets, that will go door-to-door to pick these individuals up— if you don't have one, it's like running a race without a leg. . . . The *patrón* system has changed.
>
> Michael: People tend to call it the *politiquera* system now.
>
> Chris: *Politiqueras*, exactly, the runners. That's where the power has changed. Now the new *patróns* are who? Those *politiqueras*. Those are the new *patróns*.
>
> Michael: It's interesting then, because you still get those kind of two-tier. On the top are the people who are the faces, who are going to go out and represent, but then you have the people who actually hold the votes (and power). It's interesting that the folks who hold the votes don't seem to be particularly interested in ever seeking the position themselves?

My question to conclude the dialogue below is designed to provoke a response. Are the predominantly female *politiqueras* not "particularly interested" in seeking public positions of power, or are the formal levers of office denied them? Are they powerful in their context, but

largely limited to their 'lane' in the system that bears their name? How do gender relations affect this hierarchy? Throughout this study, I have issued many more questions than answers, and because life in a community can be framed as a series of conversations, running in parallel throughout a lifespan (and even between generations), there will be time and time enough to probe most of these questions, if not with formal research participants, at least among friends.

In Texas, voters have 10 days to vote "early," or in advance of election day. During this convenient period, control of the elections process tends to reside in the hands of the local municipality, so APISD, and the cities of Américo and Paredes manage the elections. This provides an advantage for the party that controls the city or school board. As well, each day the county elections department will release a list of names of area residents who voted, so campaigns can confirm which voters a *politiquera* said would vote, actually do turn out, and presumably pay them in turn. Because so much effort is invested over this early period, across about 10 days, the early vote can often decide the election, rendering election day results less impactful.

Across the Rio Grande Valley, in the days before early voting begins, trailers and covered tents surrounded by large campaign signs appear at campus situated just beyond the 100 foot perimeter designated by law as a "campaign free" zone around a polling location. This phenomenon has become more intense over time. When I drove with my wife to videotape the phenomenon during an election day in 2015, as part of my pilot study, she was overwhelmed when a chorus of unending honking began, and large trucks roared by. The time had turned to 7:00PM, and runners posted at the county elections headquarters had received news of the early

vote results, relaying the news to the (presumably) victorious party. Iris chimed in to say, "these people congregate like none of their business. And yes, I did it when I ran (set up large camps)."

As election law evolved, so too did *politiqueras* adapt to take advantage. A provision in election law allows for voters to receive assistance if they have a disability, or difficulty understanding English. Yet, there are few safeguards to prevent use of this provision to allow a *politiquera* or runner from escorting a voter directly into the voting booth. As Iris explains:

> These runners are now saying [to voters], "I'm going to assist you." Well, why? "Because I have to. The [candidate] has told me that I have to assist you to make sure that you are voting for the party, or for what I'm caring for." And so, here you are, standing in line with maybe ten people and ten people waiting outside because, as soon as they get there, "I need assistance."
>
> Now I work, you know, election polls. We can assist you. "No, I want him" (the runner). And you know, [the law is] if the voter asked for assistance, you will get that assistant. You are an educated person. I know you since you were growing up. You went to high school. Graduated. Maybe I even gave you your diploma. You went to college. You were an educator. [Yet you say], "I need assistance."
>
> Okay. Who do you want to assist? This person over here gives you the name. . . . I mean everybody thinks it's funny or it's something that doesn't exist, but it does. Here you go to Austin and tell all these people this is wrong. Why? Assistance is you assist a person that needs assistance. I mean, there is no reason to say you don't know Spanish or you don't know English 'cause the ballot's in both languages.

> You are a graduate. A high school graduate. You work at a school district and you don't understand [English]? Here comes the assistant. You have to read a note. She doesn't even know how to read (the assistant) and she's assisting a teacher. But, I mean, laws are laws; sometimes you just wonder what's going to happen next. . . .

Texas state law allows even for the candidates themselves, if they are below the level of a state judge, such as a justice of the peace, to "assist" voters in their own election. They can literally walk a voter to the voting booth, and 'help' them make their selections. And if an elections clerk or an elections judge interferes, that might constitute a felony. In one case, when I served as an election judge in Américo, a candidate for justice of the peace assisted nearly 40 voters on election day in the single precinct that I supervised (citation omitted). She had memorized the mandatory statement required of assistants and said it with great pride when prompted; because I held firmly to the rules and made her sign her name by each voter she assisted, the local paper was able to write a story highlighting this bizarre, but (essentially) legally-protected ritual. Iris continues to describe how this process only emerged over time:

> Back in even the 80's, or maybe early 80's, you didn't have these people assisting people. You went in, cast your vote. Maybe they would take you. . . . But not like, "I have to go and help you and assist you." Because somebody sat there looking at me from that camp, that I brought you and I didn't go in with you, so is this my vote or their vote? This is where I get in trouble, and if they pay you $10 a vote you're not going to get those ten dollars, or if the candidates—and mostly it's the candidates, it's not so much the other people there, there in the camps, it's the people running, that [say] "no, but you should have gone with him."

Another provision that *politiqueras* take advantage of is curbside voting, or *curbsides*. Recently my wife was waiting in a long line outside of a polling place on a particularly hot election day, while holding our infant daughter. She called me to express her exasperation. From my familiarity with RGV politics and elections, I reminded her that there was curbside voting, which allows people to skip the line and have election workers physically bring a voting machine outside. However, before I advised her further, and due in part to her skepticism, I reviewed the state election law, which says, "If a voter is physically unable to enter the polling place, he or she may ask that an election officer bring a ballot to the entrance of the polling place or to a car at parked at the curbside" (Texas Election Code). Of course, she is not "physically unable" to enter the polling place, and so she endured the heat, pacified our infant, and voted. *Politiqueras* have no such respect for the letter of the law. As Iris describes:

> Here comes another thing, *curbsides*. Curbsides. This is what the runners are abusing big time, especially here in the APISD area. (Iris tells a story) One time this lady in Américo [I knew came in]. They brought her curb side [to the election poll]:
>
> Iris: Hi, how are you?
>
> Friend: I'm fine, [Iris], how are you?
>
> Iris: Oh, I'm doing great. Aren't you getting off?
>
> Friend: They told me that I didn't have to.
>
> Iris: Well, yeah, you don't have to, but do you know how much this machine weighs?
>
> Friend: Well, no.

Iris: Okay, I'm going to put it in your lap when you vote. . . . It's 4 o'clock already. I have to wait here until 7. And I have brought out this machine, like 50 times already. Do you know how bad my back hurts?

Friend: I'm sorry.

Iris: No *mija*, don't do this. You're only making my job really, really hard.

Curbside voting allows runners to more quickly secure a car's worth of votes, say 3 or 4, without even leaving the vehicle, and making clear to campaign workers within eyesight that they literally brought in the votes. This means they can repeat the process and make more trips in each day. As with voting assistance, the consequence for denying a voter curbside service is greater than the consequence, if ever enforced, of abusing the service.

In a very powerful "autoethnography of a first-time superintendent," Garza (2008), who worked for another small, rural school district elsewhere in the RGV, recounts a set of experiences that parallel much of what is described in oral histories within APISD:

> [C]andidates were well organized and brought in a record number of votes during early voting. They hired *politiqueras* to pick up the elderly or anyone they could coerce into their cars. As they drove them to the polls they showed them sample ballots to instruct them how to vote. They depended on early voting to gain a substantial lead; they hoped the margin would hold to overcome election day voting. (p. 172)

The consistent, pervasive regional influence of *politiqueras* comes at a cost, however.

Follow the money.

Iris: There was a lot of money involved, a lot of money that to me was like, "How did this come about?" . . . I was given an envelope with money that I didn't even know where

it came from. Sometimes it's hard to believe, but that happened. "Don't ask any questions. You pay this person $300, this other person $500," those being the runners. One gentleman told me, "You're taking the money because most of your runners are females. I'll take care of the males. You're the only female on the board. It's your responsibility to pay these people. Don't ask any questions. Here's the list of names and how much you're going to give them."

One thing I told them, they're not going to come to my house. I can either meet them somewhere, or if they want it, I can drop it off at their houses. But my house is not a house where you come and make these kinds of negotiations. I kept my house very private. In fact, there was a lot of people like E—, my friend. He had guys knocking at his door at all hours of the night. In the nine years that I was on the board, only one gentleman came asking for $20. I went to my room, got $20 out of my purse, and I told him, "Here's the $20." He told me he needed it because I think he didn't have any gas or something. . . . I said, "That'll be the first and the last time that you come to my house in the middle of the night . . . and ask me for money. You do not come to my house. I consider you a friend but not my best friend, and so you do not come to my house to collect money from me. If it were 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning, I could maybe accept that a little bit better, but in the middle of the night you will not ever again," and he did not. I never did that. E— had people coming to his house every night for years. Even in his death bedside there would be men, people calling him. He was very sick, and I thought that was very wrong.

But yes, money was involved. It just got out of hand with the runners. Basically, the *politiqueras* are the runners. Some people take 50, 60, 80 votes while others take only 5 or 6. There's just a couple of ladies that are very, very tricky. In November there's elections for judges, for constables, for school board, for all kinds of other positions. They collect from everybody. These people make good money, $10,000 in an election. When there's . . . a county election, they get people from everywhere. When it's a school election, it has to be only from school. When it's a city election, it's only from the city. . . . These particular ladies would tell you, "I will help you. I will bring the votes and almost guarantee you your win, but this is how much I want." They demanded the money. Did you want to win? Of course you wanted to win. Did you have the money? No, you didn't have the money yourself. Did donations come in? Yes, they did. The only time that I knew where the donations were coming [from] was when I had the majority. Other than that, I did not know where that money was coming from. I had an idea, but I was just told, "So and so made a donation. So and so made a donation."

While *runners* are clearly an integral part of the *politiquera* system, in some features, they do not seem distinctly different from paid campaign organizers anywhere in the world, except perhaps in how consistent and effective they are at bringing in steady batches of votes, be they 5 or 80. However, unlike traditional paid campaign organizers, runners hold a disproportionate balance of power, they know it, and they apply that knowledge to maximize their profits.

Chris: They have a two week job. And they get paid anywhere from, a good politiquera, a good runner, they'll be asking for maybe $5,000 in a county race. In the [county]

commissioner's race, . . . these same ladies that had their vendetta, they came with us. She wanted her flight paid for to Puerto Rico. . . . She got it. She was going to go see her boyfriend, her husband, in Puerto Rico, and they got it. . . . $2,000 for two weeks. That's their tax return too. People here, they'll live off of that. . . . They'll stretch it. . . . They'll work it. Then you get people that are smart, politiqueras that are smart. Who will hit the county commissioner, or the school board member, for a job. Like "I want money, and I want a job."

They'll produce the votes. They'll bring the votes in, and your guy gets into power; you're hired. Then, when the next election rolls in, well they're staying out of it, because they have their job. . . . Or if they're very motivated, they'll go and support you because they want to keep their job, or . . . they already have their job so they're not going to [participate], because they want to keep their job; they don't want to step on anybody's toes, especially if they feel like maybe you're on the out. You know?

While some runners maximize individual profits, there is also evidence of how the *politiqueras*' votes (and profits) accumulate into the hands of extended families, often led by one or more 'political' Matriarchs/Patriarchs. But profits do not end with the *politiqueras*; there are accounts of runners' monies be paid directly to voters, essentially buying votes outright.

Bob: Oh yes, exactly, exactly, that's right. . . . I'll tell you something that happened . . . that I strongly, strongly detest. There was a group out there, in opposition to the candidates that I was supporting, but that's beside the point, I wouldn't care which side, that purposely went out and recruited high school students, there at APISD, that were of age. Make sure that they got them registered (to vote), and then actually went and picked

them up and took them to the polls, and told them who to vote for, and paid them. In cash. I've heard different amounts, but it seems most of it was $15 to vote.

Yeah, $15 was a number that I heard a lot. What are we trying to teach our kids; why are we allowing something like that to go on? I mean that is totally, totally and completely opposite of what I feel we should be teaching them. Yes, we want them to vote, certainly do. The teacher, their government teacher out there had encouraged . . . them, the ones that were old enough, to be sure to get your voter registration and go vote. Didn't tell them who to vote for. Didn't offer them a nickel or a penny to just, it's just a civic duty. So to speak. But then here comes this other group, and capitalize and they won the election pretty big. You know.

To help guarantee an edge in an election, a slate will secure as many rental vehicles as possible during the period of voting, to allow runners to be deployed throughout the community to drive as many voters to the polls as possible. The runners (and the voters) may not own cars, or they may simply prefer not to spend their own gas money and see wear and tear on their vehicles, which reduces their profits. While I haven't conducted research firsthand, it is said that it is difficult to rent a vehicle in the RGV during the voting period as a consequence of this widespread practice. This represents one concrete example of the large expenses incurred by political slates. Iris describes the car rental phenomenon, and other evidence of excessive spending to secure elections, below:

It is outrageous, outrageous how much people want to get paid for picking up a vote. Now they have 40 or 50 cars rented out. Who's paying for those cars? Whoever has the big bucks or the big credit cards. It's so different than when my husband made his first

run. You make these signs, they are made, you don't have to worry about putting in two by fours (large signs, 4' x 8'). The candidate doesn't do a thing, nothing whatsoever except pay. You have a sign in your yard, you basically are telling the whole world who you're voting for.

Indeed, I've seen caravans of trailers taking these large signs around the community for a campaign. When organizing for the presidential election in 2008, I even volunteered to help install a few of these enormous signs. It is not light work! Experienced crews use post-hole diggers, a mechanism that essentially combines two large shovels with narrow heads, and requires two strong arms to operate. I struggled for 10 minutes with two others to make a dent in dry soil in front of a house, before the owner came out, and in two bold, striking motions dug deep holes. He appeared amused to see three skinny young people placing signs, and was quite surprised to hear we were not being paid. Glory weighs in on how the massive flow of money transforms the board and members:

Glory: It has gotten to the point where— And I'm sorry to say, there are some good board members on there . . ., but a lot of it is self-serving. You know, "Okay, we're gonna' have a lot of contracts, what can I get out of this?" This last year, you know that they spent, the party that won spent over $100,000 on their campaign. Why? What do you get out of it?

That's a lot of money. That's a lot of money. [Quito, my nephew] didn't have that kind of money, and he's not about to get it [from] donations. . . . If somebody came and gave us more donations, then that's fine. But he wasn't gonna' go out and solicit from the (school district) vendors and all that. Not his style. . . .

Several research participations/friends described, without any prompting, a similar amount of overall spending required to run and win on a slate today. Additionally, the reference to contracts and vendors above is key; many of the legitimate companies that do business with the school district contribute to political campaigns, as well some illegitimate 'companies' are created by friends of the controlling slate, who outsource the work at cost and split profits with board members. Conversations with sitting members of the board held prior to this research confirm this practice, but it is also well-documented in news reports. Iris and I have an engaging back and forth on the topic of money in local politics, that highlights the effects of this spending:

Iris: Do you know how much it costs to run for the board today?

Michael: How much?

Iris: How much? At least $100,000.

Michael: For the slate? And that's the interesting thing, is people can't remember anytime that somebody was able to run as an individual; it's always the slate.

Iris: Well, because you're thinking if we don't win all three or all four (seats), you won't have the majority, and what do you do? [You] don't have a voice.

Michael: Yeah, $100,000, and where does that money come from, who has $100,000 dollars laying around? Nobody really likes to answer that question.

Iris: No. I'd rather not get into it. I could probably give you maybe 50% of the answer but I'd rather not get into it, but you know it's no good. To me it's not that you want to do it, but that you have to, to be able to repay some of those promises that you made and it's sad. It's sad because, who suffers? Kids mainly; teachers, administrators. You want the best teachers to come to your district. You want the best administrators.

Most participants/friends were uncharacteristically silent when the topic turned to the ultimate source of the funds for elections, and of course I did not push them beyond their comfort levels. There were hints of 'unsavory sources,' but Bob spoke out while not naming his friend and source of information:

> They don't like for their name to be out there, because I know this has been going on for years. There's somebody, presumably from one of these communities or this area at least, that has a lot of money, that's putting big time money behind these school and city elections. Big time. I don't know who it is. I only know one man, and I won't even mention his name, that a friend of mine, we've talked about it and he had told me in confidence, he said "I know who it is." He said, "But I'm not gonna tell you, I'm not gonna tell anybody. But I know who it is, and I can tell you this, its drug money." That's all I know, and I trust this man. He says he knows who and what, I believe him. . . .
>
> They're gonna get something back out of it. They're not doing it out of the goodness of their heart, there's no question in my mind.

Roberto and his wife W— corroborate but also enhance Bob's account of the source of election money:

> Roberto: Attorneys, architects, vendors. Especially the insurance [agents].
>
> W—: Drug dealers. They get it from drug dealers. They get it from drug dealers!
>
> Roberto: That too, but the bulk of the money is attorneys, architects, insurance agents.

Regardless of the source, the escalating 'dark money' price tag ($100,000) for the election of a slate in APISD makes it very difficult for a slate to compete through a grassroots-only effort, as Quito describes in his lone successful campaign. As we explore in conversation

with Chris, this slate did not entirely "forget politics" but attempted to operate a hybrid campaign, leveraging all of the elements of a grassroots campaign, while eschewing some of the more unseemly practices of the *politiquera* campaign. Here Quito details the unique grassroots elements his slate deployed:

> I think we were outspent 4 to 1. But we had a lot of fundraisers and we block walked. I remember that summer going door to door and meeting more people in that [campaign] than I ever expected to meet. Just getting out and telling people about our platform, what it is that we wanted to do, talked about some of the issues that were facing the school, and just telling people that there was an alternative.

As Chris describes:

> It takes money to run a campaign. It takes money to get elected. To run a grass roots campaign; we've seen it work. When I ran, it was a mixture of both. You couldn't just run a grass roots campaign, you had to have some kind of funding. It was to our advantage that there was five (6, actually) positions on the board, so that brought in more funding from attorneys, maybe other political guys that want to see you succeed, like Ramon Garcia (Hidalgo County Judge), state reps.
>
> [Also], people weren't getting paid on time. Non-professionals were not getting paid on time. People wanted change and we were able to feed off of that and give them that, and utilize those concepts of identity and social structure. [Talking to] people: "Hey, you know what? We're gonna get this school back together. We're gonna get people, we're gonna bring the pride back." People bought into that and that's why we get elected.

> But it was short lived. Nonetheless, because you have to always remember that [APISD] counts us as the biggest employer in the area. So, money is more important than, I would say, an education. . . . That's what wins you an election, promises. They (helpers) want to be given an opportunity to make more funds, to make more money.
>
> From seeing the most recent school board election, Quito wanted to run a grassroots campaign, and an honest campaign. Nothing wrong with that. We need more of that stuff, but these other folks consolidated all the town with the runners. Paid them all out, and were able to get the votes in. It wasn't even close. It wasn't even a close race. (Quito lost his 2016 campaign)

In addition, several research participants/friends described in frustration how the impact of money in the political system allowed people to run and win who were not academically successful themselves, and whose motivations and qualifications were called into question. As Roberto reflects:

> How can you have somebody in a leadership position like that, when they have no education. . . . We've had some illiterate people run for school board, I'm sorry to say. . . . Here anybody with money can win an election. Even if you had the worst, you know, flunky (sometimes pronounced *flunque*) in town run. If he had the money, he'd win.

***Politiquera* system effects.** In the same way that privilege advantages members of a dominant (White) culture in numerous ways large and small, so too does the role of board member carry with it perquisites that may seem small in isolation, but in the aggregate emphasize the grand reach and influence of these local elected officials. Here is Quito sharing his first taste of proximity to this power:

> I would say the earliest memory [of the school board] was fourth grade. It was the fall, it was football season, and the football team was on this tremendous play-off run, and I remember being sort of introduced to the concept of the school board because my uncle (Glory's husband) was on the school board. Because he was on the school board, we had the opportunity to get the best tickets. We had a seat on the fan bus no-questions-asked. I remember meeting the coach for the first time. . . . I remember my uncle, understanding that my uncle had power and he was an important person in the community. . . . I just thought that was cool. I was like, "That means we get to go to all the games. We get tickets. We get access. I get to meet the players." At the time, for me that was the coolest thing.

Chris observed how the attempted use of that power for apparently benign purposes, such as "beautification" of the community, could result in unintended consequences driven by personal interests:

> I guess it depends on the candidate, or the board member, or the elected official themself. Some candidates or elected officials may have the idea of, you know what, they want to focus on construction or beautification. They want to make sure that the grass is cut on the [state highway] and Parakeet Drive. When people come to our community, our school, people are impressed. It's very clean. . . . That's the first thing you see, is your visual, right? So, I think one thing that these guys are doing, right now, and it's a good thing: Beautification. You want them to take that pride in your community and your school district. It's beautification. But, it's two-fold.

Beautification is at a cost, you know, construction is at a cost. These guys, these companies that are building these stadiums, these schools, donate to the campaigns, and you can see it. But a lot of times, if they're really smart, it's all cash. It won't be a check, it's all cash. And it's not one lump sum, it's ... so it's very illegal. But is there any evidence of it, other than somebody saying it, somebody testifying? No, because there's not even the books. One example is when we first ran our campaign, and we won, we had a total, maybe, of $30,000, $35,000 dollars between five candidates, that we raised to run the campaign. The other guys had less than we had on the books. But, according to people on the inside that I knew, the friends of mine, they had raised at least close to $100,000. So, where did that money go? What is it used for? . . . And thousands and thousands of documents, like we said in this conversation, go missing. . . .

That's why [runners] get paid $5,000, like on a slate, a five slate, or a four slate. And say you're running a three slate, which is typical here. They're gonna charge you per candidate. They're gonna be like, "2,000" (dollars each). . . . In early November, they cash in. They cash in because they'll get sheriff, commissioner, judge, school board, city. When there's huge elections, man, these people will cash in. . . . It's a business. They know what they're doing. They've been doing it for years. They'll go and get their list of registered voters from the election office. They have their list. They have their contact information. They narrow down the list, who they know. And then, people like, P—, for example, if he doesn't know you, he's gonna call you. He's in there (voting area), where he sees you. I like P—. He's a good guy. He's changed his life. He's turned around, for

the best. That's just the way it is. It's a business. . . . And it's like, "God, it is a business." Hello. It's the biggest employer.

For Bob, the concern transitions from one of unintended consequences of well-meaning policy, to a practice of quid pro quo, trading voters for promises of employment, either directly to *politiqueras*, or indirectly to their kinship networks, which often constitute the bulk of their "guaranteed" votes. Interestingly, in discussion, most participants/friends focus on individual *politiqueras*, and do not address the common kinship bonds between the groups of voters they deliver. Here Bob describes his concerns, including the fiscal effects of overstaffing:

Bob: They knew they could do anything they wanted to do, and they did, and it likened to bankrupt the district. I'm afraid that's where we're gonna be headed again now. I think we already signs of it.

That group, one of the things they were notorious for before was hiring all of their friends, you know, and it was a vote buying gimmick. "Hey we'll hire you; you've got a big family. But you got to guarantee us that you'll get all your . . . family votes next election. But we'll hire you, we'll make a place for [you]." And which they did. But they were overloaded so heavy, it's one of the reasons they were broke. Because they were way top heavy with unnecessary employees. . . .

Roberto confirms the prevalence of this unwritten, invisible "policy" for hiring:

Even if it's not a written policy, [now] what's in practice is, "You're going to hire nothing but locals. No matter how qualified or unqualified they are. We're going to hire nothing but local."

Glory herself seemed to benefit from an unwritten policy of hiring locals, especially those with connections to the school board. As she describes (without comment):

> I talked to myself and said, "What am I doing? I love teaching, I can go teach, and I can have more time to spend with my grandchildren." Just at the right time, Mr. B— (superintendent) called me. My husband was on the board, so they had that connection. My husband was serving on the school board. He knew I had my teaching certificate, and I had a lot of help.

For context, the "help" Glory was likely referring to was from her previous employer, a bank, which allowed her to complete her student teaching without quitting her job. She described that support after this selection of text. However, it is clear that she benefited in achieving her goal of teaching by having her husband on the board. A similar pattern of hiring through board member connections, however, eventually caused a sense of disillusionment for her husband, and for Glory:

> My husband was very disillusioned, and he said we would spend hours on which custodian to hire. But . . ., it came to buy books, or "we need this for our students" . . . ah yeah, no discussion or nothing. . . . No interest. Oh, but there's a position opening for a teacher aide or, "We have to get our people in there." That was a big, very important discussion. But you know, a new program coming in or something, you know, for our kids? It wasn't important.

Quito's transformation occurred along a much shorter timeline, as he watched the ambition and optimism of his near unanimous slate devolve into a set of tensions and conflicts. There were conflicts revolving around personal interests, business interests, and prioritizing the

needs of the 'donors' and campaign assistants (runners), including those with close family ties, all in contrast to the perennial needs and priorities of the oft-forgotten students. As Quito describes, the transition begins slowly, with ambiguities around right/wrong giving way to a desire to "help" the people you have ties to:

> I think for a lot of us board members, we come in and we don't get a rule book. We come in and we go to one training session on what we can and can't do. I think a lot of board members come in, especially your local board members, in these small communities they know everybody. They feel like they got a relationship with them. If you come to me, "I know Michael, I think I can help him out, right?" Even though legally I probably shouldn't, right? So, for me as a board member, it becomes a matter of finding that balance. If I can help them, maybe not directly working with them, but talking, "What's going on here? What can we do? What's the best thing? How is this affecting everybody else?"
>
> I remember after the election (Quito's slate won all 6 seats) we identified a president and vice president and whatnot, initially (as President) I got a bunch of phone calls. People would ask me for things and I would tell them, "Call the superintendent." A teacher would complain and I would say, "Okay, well, what does policy say? Follow the chain of command. Don't call me." I'd explain the process, I'd say, "Look, if this gets to a level 3 grievance, that's when it gets to the board." I said, "If I engage and talk to you about this then I can't listen to your grievance. I have to recuse myself." I saw my position as educating a lot of the public about what we can and can't do, or should and shouldn't do.

In the early phase, you identify your leadership structure and you make sure your board understands their role. But everybody wants to be important, everybody wants to have a say. The challenge is how do you . . . remain focused on the original reasons for running? Because going into it I didn't think there was self-interest. I know that wasn't my reason for running.

In time, however, self-interest arises and begins to compete with policy priorities:

Quito: It was very hard because some of our board members had outside businesses, and they have business relationships with people in the district. And the best decision for the district wasn't the best decision for their business, or for them as individuals. So, I think you have to understand, if you are on the board, you represent— your constituents aren't the community, your constituents are the kids.

And so you have to remember— you serve the kids, and you are not serving, not even the community, it's about the kids. So, I think a lot of times, they lose sight of that. They think it's the people that got them elected. Well no, it's the kids. Kids are your constituents. It's the kids you need to serve. And so that was challenging.

In this regard, Bob's closing thoughts on politics mirror those of Glory, Quito, and several of the board members and classmates:

Well, that's my concern. I think we're wasting time, money, and effort in political affairs. Whereas, the money and the time and the effort could be much better served if we would dedicate that to improving the quality of education that we offer for our students. That's where we all should be looking, you know, and how can we improve this? We want our children to do better, you know. And I certainly do. I don't care who they are. I want to

see [that] my tax money goes to support the education of our local students. I want to see the best that we can give them. I really do. I think they deserve that.

In the end, these various tensions can take a personal toll:

> Glory: So, you know the game takes its toll even after you win office, because you have to pay back . . . the debt. And then it's, well, okay, "You helped me out last year with my [payment]. But now, what are you doing for me now?" It's a never-ending thing. 'Cause I mean, people are you know, desperate or broke, or whatever. They need gas, then they'll just start [asking].

In most of my conversations with former school board officials, it became clear that a board member's actual power (and potential spoils) was dramatically increased when they were in the majority, and reduced to near zero when they were in the minority. Iris describes this challenge, since she served in the minority for most of her tenure. I am sensitive to how her experience might have been compounded by gender inequities explored further below.

> Iris: I didn't have the majority on the board for quite some time, so my voice was—huh [gestures dismissively]— like I hadn't talked. . . . When this was going on. I think that in the three terms that I was there, I just had one term that we really had the majority and that's when Glory and I were on the board. I think when I was appointed, we had the majority. . . . But it was very difficult, very difficult. It's just like sitting there but not having a voice. They would hide from me. They would not tell me a lot of things. Eventually we would find out.

As Iris confirms, "[board service] takes a lot of your time from your family. . . . It's not as easy as people think."

As he reflected on his life and his board service, Roberto often found himself in principled positions in which he observed but chose not to participate in personally troubling behavior. Roberto sees a trend in his life arising at three distinct stages:

> (Childhood) "I would be the go between the Anglo administration and the "Hispanic hotheads" as they would call them. Ok. I kept things under control."
>
> (Board) "I never cut any deals. I never did. I used logic. I was accused of trying to push my agenda. [...] And I go, "It's not about me, it's about the kids." I asked a very simple question: Why not? [...] what you're saying is our kids are dumber than everybody else's kids, and they're not."
>
> (Post-Board Community Service) "I was put in charge, because like I said I was acceptable to both the Anglos and the Hispanics, and it's been a challenge. The Hispanics have not forgotten the past, and the Anglos haven't either. The Anglos were in charge at one time, they were used to having their way, because they were the patrones, and Hispanics did not forget all the discrimination that took place in the past. [...] I go right down the middle; the past is the past, the present is the present."

In a subsequent conversation, we explored in greater detail what he meant by the Board "cutting deals." It was from this discussion that I was able to draw out a powerful social network graph that helps explain what the state investigators missed in 2006 (Figure 14). It is a holistic, visual representation of the comprehensive *politiquera* system as described throughout this section.

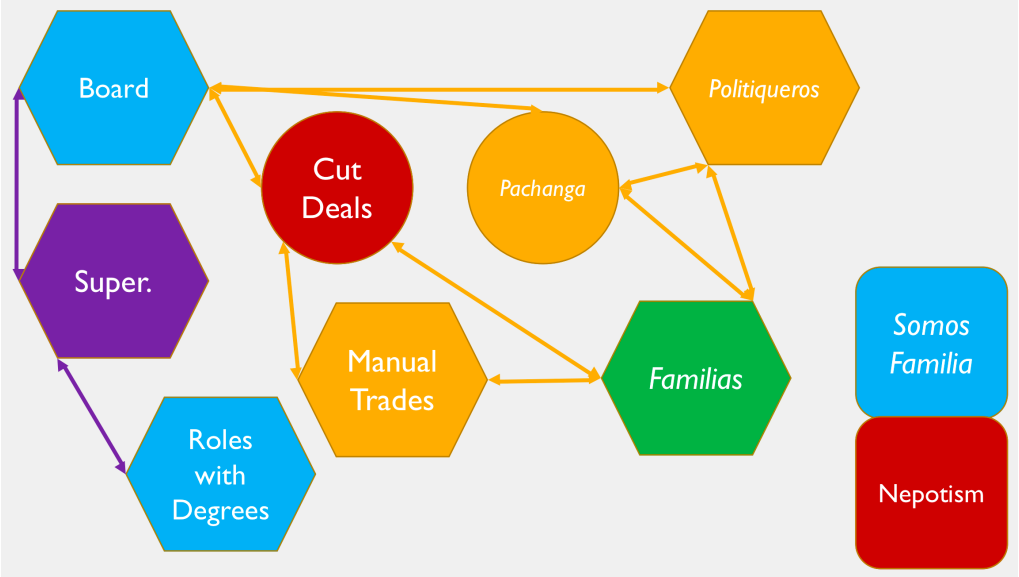

Figure 14. A social network diagram represents the *politiquera* system

As Roberto and other participants/friends validate, *politiqueras* work with *familias*, to "cut deals" ensuring employment in a manual trade role (or other economic benefit) for a member of a family. In exchange, the members of the extended family agree to vote for the *slate*, or particular group of board members. Prior to and after an electoral victory, all these parties gather for a *pachanga*, a raucous, celebratory event which I captured in video form as an artifact after a recent election. The rectangle describing the notion of *somos familia* is represented as an alternate (internal) take on the external (White) perception of *nepotism* that is not so much inaccurate as it is incomplete; context matters, and this is especially true when contemplating the enormity of the *politiquera* system.

Having detailed the various exploits (hacks?) of the electoral system that *politiqueras* celebrate in their scramble to deliver maximum votes, and more importantly to extract maximum profits, it may seem obvious to ask—*Is anyone in law enforcement paying attention?* The answer is, 'indeed yes,' but also 'it does not really matter.' There is a level of sophistication in

the organization of the actual *politiquera* campaign that is often missed by outside analysis, and partially accounts for the persistence of the system.

A 2013 annual report from the U.S. Attorney's Office on public corruption convictions finds that the Southern Texas region ranked 1st in convictions in 2013, as compared to 93 other districts (Annual Report, 2013). As well, in the overall preceding decade, the RGV/South Texas ranked 3rd in overall convictions for public corruption. Still, as Mark Twain once famously said, rumors of the "death" of the *politiquera* system have been greatly exaggerated. Farther still, the consequences of this pervasive political practice should not be underestimated.

A Reduction in Force (RIF). The Reduction in Force (RIF) that occurred beginning in December 2008, was in the simplest form a consequence of excessive spending (on staff salaries), against a declining fund balance that even multi-million dollar bank loans could not compensate for. An equally important factor was increasing scrutiny from the State of Texas, whose 2006 legislative performance review of APISD warned of the consequences of "overstaffing." As addressed in the introduction, APISD overstaffed in areas that did not require a college degree, or state certification, such as: child nutrition staff, educational aides, custodians, clerks, secretaries, security guards, and bus drivers. These are precisely the same positions that were described by board members above as rewards given to runners and others tied to winning political slates.

In the context of the *politiquera* system then, "overstaffing" was just a common cultural practice taken to extremes. The limits of the system were being tested, and the consequences were devastating for many. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) required that APISD hire a conservator, an outside administrator paid for by the district, with control over budget decisions,

until APISD restored their fund balance, and fell in line with state targets for staffing. It was this conservator that helped execute the RIF, which is a euphemism for 'mass layoffs.'

Iris, who was serving on the board at this time, gave a very powerful description of having to oversee this process:

> It's like, "Oh my God, we have to do this when we had to get rid of the— the RIF?" That was a thing that I— I lost about three or four nights of sleep because I knew this was going to happen and I felt like: "Oh my God, I'm going to do this. I'm going" ...
>
> Because you were told you have to do it.
>
> And it was very, very hard. You know, you go to this board meeting, faced with all these people, but yet your hands are tied. Here I am making this drastic change in so many families. . . . What we have always done, is help instead of, and I felt like I was going to hurt, that I was going to make such an impact. That I was making this decision that, my God, how could I do this? That's against everything I believe.
>
> And so, it was very, very hard. I never, never thought that seven people could decide the difference in the lives that we were going to touch. Thinking about ladies, men, even people in the office that have to be *rifted*.
>
> Certainly there was bad pressure. . . . The superintendent had said, "I'm not going to give you any names, for a while." . . . I think we got the names the day of the meeting and people were coming, [asking] "Hey am I on the list?" I don't know if you are on the list because I haven't seen any list. [Asking], "Am I going to get *rifted*? Am I going to lose my job? Is my wife going to lose my job? Is my son or my daughter?" I don't know because I don't know any names. All I know is that certain people from certain

departments from certain areas are going to have to be cut, but I can't tell you if you're there, or your son, or your mom, or any family members is there.

I lost so much sleep. It bothered me like big, big time. I was eating sometimes and I would say, oh my God, is this family going to have something eat next month? Because, it made so much difference. Of course, nobody is going to die from hunger here because you have so much help but it was a very, very tough decision that had to be made and there were others too. There were other decisions that had to be made that I felt like, what am I doing here? Why am I here doing this? Is it for the good of the community? Is it for the good of the school? Is it because these people are pressuring you to do something you don't want to?

In an article describing the raucous environment surrounding the arrival of the TEA conservator, Iris claims she tried to intervene years before:

"We made an attempt to get TEA out here almost two years ago," trustee [Iris] said. "It would have saved us a lot of heartache and a lot of money."

Even after placing the district in financial conservatorship, the state agency postponed L—'s (conservator) scheduled arrival by three weeks at the request of former school board president J—, who was concerned the situation would interfere with the hotly contested school board elections earlier this month.

At a special board meeting Monday night, hundreds of APISD residents cheered as a new board majority was sworn in and assumed the panel's leadership positions - ousting a majority that led the school system through the past two years of financial decline.

> Some hooted and yelled as their candidates took their new seats. One man interrupted proceedings by braying out the chorus from arena rock band Queen's hit song "We Are the Champions."
>
> L—, a former superintendent of [a school district] outside of El Paso, will have to contend with this charged political climate as he begins his review of the district's books. (source omitted)

At the same time that Glory, in the minority, was having to simply endure this difficult leadership challenge, Quito was taking note and contemplating how he might change things for the better. One slate's calamity is another (future) slate's opportunity. As Quito explains:

> In 2008, that was when the district blew through its fund balance, there was about $10 million in the red, had to let go of over 200 people. . . . And it just seemed to get progressively worse. And it was in 2011 when I told my wife, "You know what, I'm going to run for [APISD] Board."

Gender power inequality. Both Glory and Iris ran for school board after their husbands had served multiple terms. This was certainly not the case for the male board members I interviewed. Also, in their dialogues, you see that Glory and Iris reference their husbands frequently, sometimes before describing their own experience. The same is not true for the male board members interviewed. Generally, this creates an impression of masculine priority, "putting the husband first" and inherent superiority. This power dynamic manifested itself in many ways.

Iris, for example, expressed her surprise at how little she knew, as a consequence of a structured silence around decision-making during the lengthy period of time that her husband served on the school board:

> I didn't know a lot of things. I did not. [My husband] was not a person to come home and say, "Well this, and this and this and this happened." No. I mean, he kept it very business-like, very private, too. I mean, sometimes when we had our meetings for the [APISD] club, people would ask him, "Well, what did you all discuss, or did you come to a decision that you're going to pass this, or you voted it 'no.' " They wanted to know the "why's," you know.
>
> First as a wife, I really didn't ask a lot, you know. If I heard it— and sometimes I would hear it from other people before he even came home and tell me this happened, but, you know, I felt like: "Well, he knows what he's doing, I'm just going to stay out."

In particular, the phrase "as a wife, I really didn't ask a lot" implies Iris is fitting into a common cultural role. Notably, neither Glory nor Iris explicitly addressed issues of gender or power inequity until I prompted the discussion. While in other areas, such as the walkout, they seemed to demur, here they embraced the opportunity to weigh in:

> Michael: Men tend to be in charge of a lot of things (in APISD) for a long period of time. How was it as a woman?
>
> Iris: Very frustrating. Very. I don't know if Miss [Glory] is gonna' tell you this, but she actually walked out on one of the meetings, during the meeting. Because this person was like, hammering her. And wouldn't let her say her word, or what she was feeling or what she thought was better, and she actually left, walked out. I never did that, I don't know if

I didn't want to embarrass myself in front of all the people, or if actually, like, my tolerance is maybe a little bit less than hers, but she did. Terrible. Terrible to where I would say, "Oh my God. My husband, my dad, never treated me this way, and I have to stand for this from these gentlemen." It was awful.

Michael: I wonder if the men in that conversation even remember that, or if they did, if they laughed at it?

Iris: They laughed at it. I mean, I would hate to be their wives, in their shoes. I would hate that. I don't know what kind of husbands or fathers they are. But as far as treating women with respect— no respect at all.

Michael: And I would say anytime I see four or five guys together in a certain environment, they can say some pretty inappropriate things as well. I'd find it hard to believe that board members could hold themselves back?

Iris: Not during executive session. Once in a while they'd say, "Ah, excuse me Ms. [Iris]," you know. Terrible things were said there. Terrible. About people that I knew, and respected. And for them to think about them that way? It was basically very offensive. . . . Sometimes I think back. Why did I last there so long? Like I tell you, my second term I was [thinking] why am I doing this? I know what it's all about. Why am I doing this again? But then I would tell friends or relatives and they'd say, "No, no, no, you gotta' be in there. You're our voice and our ears." Even though I didn't have much of a voice, but [they'd say], "No, no, run again. We'll support you. You're gonna win. You're going to win." And sure enough, you know. But I did have second thoughts on my second election, my second term.

It's very important to take note of the last comment. Not only did gender dynamics make it harder for women to run for school board, but also caused them to have second thoughts about service once they were elected:

> Michael: So one last question to think about. Is it harder, or is there any difference, for a woman to run and serve in the community, than for a man?
>
> Glory: Oh, definitely. Definitely. More people think that men are going to do a better job. I mean, look, there had never been a woman since F—. . . . And I don't know if anybody had run before me. I really don't, I can't tell you that. But some people didn't think that I should, I'm sure. Because I was a woman; "it's a job for a man." But now, how many have we had since? Except for me and Iris. So, has there been anybody else? . . . The majority is still definitely men. It's just something that I don't think gets talked about a lot.

At this point in the conversation, we walk through my research notes and her recollection, and land at a range of 4-6 women total since the inception of the school district. Limitations in the record keeping generally make it hard to confirm the two names Glory mentioned that were not in my records. Perhaps they were elected, or appointed, and happened to fall in years for which there is no record kept in a public space. However, I am promoting a public effort to make APISD residents aware of the gaps in annuals, and other records in the high school library, which has become the de facto, though neglected space for institutional knowledge.

Roots in community service. The theme of community service ran through many of the conversations with research participants/friends. For the older male generation, including Bob, Roberto and Humberto, this also involves participating in the armed services.

As an example, Quito, part of the younger male generation, service preceded his political service, as he describes:

> I've always been involved at some level, and so actually I came back, joined UTPA, but then I was immediately asked to serve on the board for Llano Grande, so I served on the Llano Grande board for 2 years (2002 to 2004). And then jumped on the board [of the] Boys and Girls' Club, was involved with Boys and Girls' Club 'til 2009. And so, service is always something that I think has sort of been really important to me.

For Iris, service is still a major part of her life. She leverages the legacy of her late husband to raise funds for students, and also runs the local food bank. In fact, our conversation was 'interrupted' several times due to phone calls from food bank organizers trying to find volunteers. After Iris described how hard it was to find young people who could help unload and organize a large truck's worth of food, I felt compelled to volunteer at least one day, and indeed it was an exhausting but fulfilling experience.

Here she details her efforts:

> My children and I have organized [my husband's] memorial scholarship and since his passing, we've been enabled to give out scholarships to ... started out with three, now we do two every year and we have a fundraiser, usually just one but we might need to make another one because, I mean, it's getting too hard to get funds for the organization. We do a barbecue, cook-out, a cook-out that raises the money, they come and compete on their cooking teams and stuff like that. Of course, we're very, very proud of our [memorial] school [named after my late husband]. I try to get involved with them, I buy them turkeys

for their families that are in most need, through the counselor's office; we did 20 families this year.

[I also serve at the Paredes food bank, managing community service]. The judge gives [our volunteers] an option, "You want to spend a couple of days in jail or you want to do community service?" Hey, they're giving you this option of community service. Now, I understand people work. I had a bus driver that went in about three weeks ago after his bus route because he had to do community hours. He says, "If I can make it at 9:30?" [I said,] "You're welcome to come at 9:30; we're there most of the morning." I tell my volunteers I'm a very passive person. I'm very patient and I can tolerate a lot. Of course, you have your limits. You have to put a stop to some things. But I tell my volunteers, "If you get one of these people that come in and say something, tell them to go to me or just walk away." . . .

If you go to the food bank, nobody leaves without a bag of food. 99% of the people qualify, basically because, hey, everybody's poor here. . . . Everybody qualifies, because, I mean, at one time we were [the] poorest school district in the state of Texas.

I personally like to do for other people. I personally think that one day, I can leave this earth and say, "My mom did this. My dad did this." Where my kids hopefully will follow my footsteps and say, "We should keep this going and help. Help the needy."

This ethos of service was embodied by an organization created in the 1970's, called the APISD Area Civic Organization (ACO). What apparently started as a genuine organization focused on community service, over time became a de facto political party, and exerted influence

over the selection of candidates. Glory and Iris both describe how they and their husbands helped found the organization.

> Iris: [My husband] and his friends at one time, and I'm talking about maybe the early '70s, decided to organize an organization that was called [APISD] Area Civic Organization. And we would make fundraisers when there was a funeral that families didn't have [money for], we would help out when there was a person that had an illness, a long-term illness. We would help out with donations. I mean there's a lot of good memories, and he tried to do the best he could for his community and serve his community. . . .

In time the service organization turned toward advocacy, and politics. As Iris continues:

> More people were coming in and joining our club. We had monthly meetings, we had people come in. We would meet at different houses, we would make phone calls and say, "Hey, we're having a meeting, get yourself over here and hear what's going on in the city and the school, get informed so you can go back and tell friends and relatives what's going on, programs that are coming in." Same thing with the city, "We need a street fixed, let's go to the city meeting." We'd delegate maybe two or three people to go, not the whole crowd, but just a couple of people to kind of voice what their concerns.

Glory shares that APISD ACO motivated her to run for office:

> I guess I was very involved in the community, and through my husband and the organization and everything. Anyway, they voted me in, they wanted me to run, so I did. . . . I didn't hesitate; they wanted me to run, I'll run.

Several cycles later, Glory was able to help guide Quito (her nephew) into gaining the endorsement of both APISD ACO and Better APISD, completing a cycle of 'service organizations' as political kingmakers with not insignificant reach. As Quito describes:

> Well, we had, I think we had the leadership of the old [Better APISD] club and [APISD Area Civic Organization] supporting us. And in fact, I remember they called us in to a meeting, in order to get their blessing. So we had all of these older [people]— my aunt (Glory) was there, and my uncle— kind of talking strategy and what we needed to do, in order to secure their support. . . . They thought one of the slates would pull votes from the same group that we would, so they wanted us to meet with that slate and to combine slates. We weren't happy with it, but we agreed. So, we met with the other candidates, and they didn't want anything to do with us. So then, these elders met with them, and yeah, still they didn't want to budge. So, the elders said, "Forget them. We're going to support you all."

Renewing a Cycle of Socialization

Lauro et al. (2004) help set the stage for interpreting the various experiences described above, including *politiqueras*' excess, as a cycle of socialization in which "schools have subjected Mexican American children to the systemic patterns of cultural reproduction of values and beliefs of Anglo America" (p. 511).

Quito sets the stage for examining the effects of social change around the 1968 walkout on the student experience, and testing the durability of socialization, for example around the sustained concept of linguistic terrorism:

(On school) It was great. It was fun. The teachers were caring, the kids were— I think my biggest challenge was I didn't speak Spanish, and so a lot of my friends did. The only area where I felt like I missed out was in jokes, in joking. It took me years to understand the jokes. But my parents— that was deliberate on my parents' part. My parents said when they were growing up, they were going to school, they were punished for speaking Spanish. My father attended the East Town school district through junior high, and he said in elementary there were two tracks. He said if you could speak English, you had the Anglo teachers. He said if you didn't speak English well, you had the Mexican teachers. He said there was a clear distinction in the quality of education and in the opportunities provided to the students.

Quito's parental guidance is insightful in one respect, because we see that East Town students experienced similar tracking and linguistic terrorism operating in parallel, which created a preference for English, to guarantee access to Anglo teachers. This is another strategy, like "thinking White," which may have added credibility since Quito attended Stanford, and eventually obtained a Ph.D. from UT – Austin. Yet clearly Quito feels the loss of both fraternity and capacity, and you sense his longing for linguistic kinship, which I know he has, to some extent, since rekindled.

In addition to sharing a lived experience that validated the effects of linguistic terrorism, Quito reveals how tracking and segregation have been sustained, but also changed over time. Mastery of English still drives unequal outcomes, however, it is not primarily between race/ethnic groups that these divisions take place, but within a more homogenous Hispanic student population divided along new sociocultural lines. This extends from the analysis of a

cultural political economy—which emphasizes electoral outcomes—and examines how affluence and ability separate students' experience. Quito describes his shock at seeing inequity in his K-12 schooling, starting with the emergence of the *slacker teacher* in junior high:

> In . . . junior high I saw more of the slacker teachers. . . . That's when I think I was introduced to the slacker teacher. I think in elementary school I had good teachers. They always tried their best, I think. All of my teachers were really enthusiastic about their job. They'd come in and we had a good time. We always had fun. I think junior high and high school, that's when I started to see, "Okay, there are teachers that just don't care. This is really boring. This is not challenging at all. What am I doing here?"
>
> I think I recognize inequality and inequity, and I recognized early on. I remember in elementary school, the kids that didn't speak English well, the kids that didn't have money, how they were treated differently. In elementary school, I remember they had separate facilities. They had the portable buildings. They were either in the back of the school or on the side, and that's where all of the kids that didn't speak English went.
>
> Then senior year I had a half day's worth of classes, so I would tutor kids. I would go and tutor kids in other classes and I could see the difference. I saw the kind of education that they got and the lack of opportunities. It was terrible. The teachers were horrible. They didn't do anything and they didn't expect much of them and it was sad. It was sad.
>
> We had this class called *resource*, and so I'd go in during the last period of the day and I had three students. One of them was partially deaf. The other one was a paraplegic, and the third had visual impairment. They were good kids and they just— I

don't know. I worked really well with them. I was patient with them and I did a good job, I think, of keeping them focused. I remember the instructors of the course, one day that I came in early they asked, "How do you do it?" They said, "How do you deal with them? We can't stand them." I thought, "Don't tell me. You shouldn't be telling me this. This is horrible." When I wouldn't show up, or when I had something and I couldn't be there, the students would go and they would ask for me and if I wasn't there they would leave. They wouldn't stay.

I just felt like this was wrong. . . . You could go to the same school and have a completely opposite experience of somebody who's doing well and has access to everything. I had access to everything. I was a year removed from going on an East Coast trip where I visited the best colleges in the country, and I missed two weeks of school. Most of the kids would never have that opportunity.

Clearly Quito is troubled by his experience, as should be all educators, parents, and caring people generally. The newer waves of segregation may have disproportionately targeted students of varying ability. Instead of swats with a paddle, they may be isolated, and surrounded by educators who are not adequately prepared, and have grown bitter. I use qualifying language like "may have" and "may be" not because I doubt the accuracy of Quito's claim, but because his observations are specific to a post-1980s era, and I do not want to create a false impression that his experience is representative of all students in APISD currently. Instead, this discussion paves the way for future research along the lines I originally envisioned: *What labels are being applied to students today* (in Quito's case: *resource students*), *and how do these labels affect teachers' expectations and actions in the classroom?*

A cultural political economy. In the *politiquera* system that today predominates, and evolved after the rise to power of a Hispanic school board, a *cultural political economy* (CPE) can refer less to the affluence of the participants, as compared to the willingness of participants to accept cash from unspoken sources that pays for the actual *politiqueras* and *pachangas* and other related costs. So success, and especially repeated success, is aligned to whether you "play the game" and accept the system. Of course, you are allowed to use public-facing slogans promoting "change" and opposing "corruption"—so long as you also find a dark money source for $100,000 or more. However, as I explore the implications of this sophisticated and enduring CPE/*politiquera* system, it is important to consider this cultural reality in relation to political myths embedded in state-funded K-12 curricula.

Critical research inquiries interrogating K-12 social studies curricula in the aggregate (Loewen, 1996) and in the local context (Kunnie, 2010; Romero, 2010) frequently uncover myths, operationalized as mistruths embedded in 'historical' texts, which advance the cultural values held by predominantly White men. These texts often carry the force of law and are imposed on students with both congruent (White) and incongruent (non-White) cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. This situates teachers in the best case as cultural diplomats (Gay, 1989) who act as "ambassadors of the institution of schooling and diplomatic negotiators of the differences of minoritized communities" (Richardson & Pisani, 2012). In the worst case, teachers are coopted as enforcers of a state-sanctioned campaign to "criminalize indigenous knowledge" (Rodríguez, 2013). Researchers can support these teachers and students by advancing deeper investigations into everyday harms posed by varying sub-strands of this White master narrative.

The received myth taught in school of 'one person, one vote' for example, attempts to normalize an unproven assumption of power equality. As the oral histories demonstrate, this assumption does not hold true historically in APISD, due to a well-documented, explicit exclusion of Hispanic community members from full political participation. Nor does the concept of 'one person, one vote' apply in contemporary electoral politics, as a consequence of a de facto unequal distribution of political power along lines of wealth (or access to dark money), willingness to play the (*politiquera*) game, and gender.

To account for discrepancies between rhetoric and reality, I discuss an alternative cultural political economy of electoral participation, which constitutes a component of the broader hidden curriculum that operates in opposition to formal curricula in social studies and government. In effect, slates with access to (near) unlimited resources can deploy *politiqueras* and wield voting power equal to, or in excess of large populations of Hispanic residents who do not participate in the CPE/*politiquera* system. This presents a troubling inequality I consider in greater depth.

Critical research on cultural political economy "examines the contested dynamics of power and wealth . . ., their historical dimensions, and . . . the role of capital and race in structuring urban space," (Lipman, 2013, p. 16). Of course, here we are dealing with a rural space. As Tabb (1999) explains, a cultural political economy "begins with the social individual facing contingent choices and bounded rationality, and considers institutions and governance mechanisms that constrain and guide individual and group activity" (p. 16). This contrasts the mythical notion of the voter as a practitioner of rational choice theory, who is assumed to have access to all necessary information, and to be largely unbound from external influence. In fact, social choices "are constrained by governance structures and a cultural economy of attitudes,

norms, and values embedded in the historically specific institutions of a society" (p. 15), which in the U.S. context refers to prioritizing White supremacist values, worldviews, ways of knowing, and preferred methodologies.

Full electoral participation in Américo-Paredes is reserved only for the select few who meet two conditions; they are (very) wealthy or have access to, in the case of APISD, $100,000, and their values align with the *politiquera* system. This elite group is afforded full enfranchisement, while all others make do with a small, often nominal, fraction of the electoral influence.

Thucydides asserts that "right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (p. 352, 1996). What we must do as researchers to ameliorate the suffering of the structurally "weak" is demythologize and decolonize our curricula, thereby supporting teachers' capacity to serve as cultural diplomats (Gay, 1989), empowering students in classrooms and in all spaces of political significance. This is especially important because we find an interesting alignment between the local politics, and state and federal iterations of a cultural political economy.

While the distinct RGV/APISD culture and *politiquera* system is not presumed to be directly generalizable to Texas and America as a whole, the effect of the system may produce similar power inequities. Basically, the game is different everywhere, but everywhere there is a game, and everywhere it is governed by money and a dominant culture demanding fealty.

To review, locally our interviews establish that school board races can be decided by infusions of cash from a single individual contributing $100,000 to support a "slate" or aligned group of candidates, with an average cost per vote (at times directly) of $10, with costs

sometimes as high as $20 per vote. The money is allocated in various ways, and often involves immediate payouts, coupled with future guarantees of employment, offered to one or more members of an extended family. In return, these *politiqueras* guarantee turnout from their kinship network, whose names are submitted, and then checked against the public, early voting roster for compliance. Additionally, campaigns make use of "assistants" who stand inside or nearby polling places and are "requested" by voters to stand beside them as they cast the ballot.

In fact, while candidates for State Representative are restricted from serving as assistants for voters in their own elections, the same restriction is not enforced for down ballot candidates. In one case within the South Texas school district we represent, a local candidate for justice of the peace "assisted" 39 voters in a single precinct on her own election day, a process that was well documented in accordance with legal statutes (source omitted). A review of more than 3,000 votes during that same 2010 election found 36.9 percent of voters in the sample received assistance from a person of their choosing (source omitted). This *politiquera* system is highly sophisticated, and allows for greater assurances of influence over voters, which further encourages a political economy of electoral participation in local elections.

Within Texas, the Texas Tribune, a non-profit news organization with a tendency to improve access to state databases, provides a "cost per vote" table for primaries and general elections, based on campaign expenditures. In recent instances, the range for state elected officials has been anywhere from $0 per vote to $300 per vote, with a median of around $10 per vote (Aaronson, 2016; Murphy & Swicegood, 2014). The largest individual contributor within a single electoral cycle in Texas gave $50,000,000, a staggering figure made feasible because Texas does not place limits on campaign contributions. To frame this mathematically, a single

vote by a single voter who does not hold power within the hierarchy of the cultural political economy, is worth about $10 on average. This holds relatively true from the local to the state level. However, the notion that one person can buy electoral influence with an injection of as much as $50 million in Texas suggests a maximum (historical) range of voter influence representing a ratio of 1 to ($50,000,000 / $10), or 1:5,000,000. Basically, one person can attempt to acquire and thus equal the influence of 5 million others.

At the federal level, Jane Mayer reveals that Freedom Partners, an organization led by Charles and David Koch, set a goal of raising $889 million to exert influence over the 2016 electoral cycle (Mayer, 2016). If we extrapolate our earlier analysis, and adopt the $10 per vote Texas figure, a maximum ratio comparing a nominal voter to each individual Koch brother might be 1 to ($889,000,000 / $10 / 2 brothers), or 1:44,450,000. Each Koch brother may attempt to acquire and equal the influence of more than 44 million Americans.

Most critically, this is not even news to political observers, and the courts. The Supreme Court admits that "voting discrimination still exists" (*Shelby County v. Holder*, 2013), yet they make a point to emphasize that racial disparities in voter registration and turnout have improved substantially since 1965, with African American participation exceeding that of Whites in several of the original "covered" states of the Voting Rights Act. Notably, no attempt is made to consider participation rates of other minorities, including Hispanic Americans.

Despite evidence of improvements in democratic participation by one lone measure, in *South Carolina v. Katzenbach* (1966) the majority opinion notes that in the face of legal progress states persistently switch "to discriminatory devices not covered by the federal decrees." Campbell's law (1979) suggests that if a policy overemphasizes one single measure, such as

disparities in voter registration, an unintended consequence of the policy may be the creation of perverse incentives that encourage gaming of the measure. Consider, for example, several studies that show a positive correlation between contact by political operatives and voter turnout (Green & Schwam-Baird, 2016). The flood of dark money into state and federal politics, which should widen the gap in influence between champions of White supremacy and all others, may technically improve voter turnout, including for historically oppressed populations. Voters who are 'bought and sold' in an electoral marketplace are still voters, after all. The benefit for dominant White culture is an appearance of equality that erodes accountability for a systemic disempowerment of Hispanic and Black communities, and other minorities, while actually increasing the power disparities. This is consistent with the notion of Colonization 2.0, where colonizers avoid accountability while continuing to accumulate disproportionate power.

While some scholars focus on evaluating how an imperfect, decentralized system of casting individual ballots may yield to bias, and stifle turnout (Ansolabehere & Persily, 2010), I move beyond the ballot box. The worst kept secret in politics, and the best-preserved myth in textbooks, is that casting a ballot is only the first step in a series of actions that constitute a full 'vote' to influence the electoral system.

The actual influence of voters through a contemporary cultural political economy carries forward "an insidious and pervasive evil . . . perpetuated in certain parts of our country through unremitting and ingenious defiance of the Constitution" (*South Carolina v. Katzenbach*, 1966). It is not simply a matter of addressing a sustained inequality in electoral participation, however, but considering how dominant players are incentivized to leverage their clout to continually increase their share of voting purchase power in the electoral marketplace.

Beyond APISD and the *politiquera* system, in state and national politics, this is equally true. As an example, corporations, foundations, and individuals provided contributions to support the plaintiffs in Shelby County v. Holder (Biskupic, 2012), which eliminated key elements of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Similar funding helped Republicans orchestrate a takeover of state legislatures in 2010 (McDonald, 2011), allowing for greater control over redistricting, and the "redrawing of lines for four times as many congressional districts" (Pierce, Elliott, & Meyer, 2012) as compared to rival Democrats. The elimination of most federal oversight in Shelby County v. Holder meant the absence of any mediator whom might interrupt this bipartisan tradition of gerrymandering districts. It is a vicious cycle that works. In 2012, Republicans won a 234-201 majority in the U.S. House "despite Democrats receiving more votes in congressional races overall" (Groeger, et al., 2012).

To grant students of color de jure equal access to state-financed curricula, while simultaneously promoting myths of electoral participation that in effect exacerbate power inequities, is a 'win-win' compromise consistent with the principal of interest convergence, as drawn from Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1980). It is essential that researchers help teachers and students expose this harmful White master narrative, and reveal the hidden curriculum where possible, including evidence of a cultural political economy of electoral participation.

Lay theories of child development. Embedded in the narratives for most of the participants/friends are lay theories of human behavior (Bernardo et al., 2016; Furnham & Weir, 1996), adult and student character and habits, which (generally) are perceived to have changed over time, and consequently affected the community. Specifically, Bernardo et al. (2016)

describe lay theories as helping to "aid individuals in constructing meaning, forming predictions, and guiding decisions they make about our social worlds" (p. 232).

Lay theories contribute to the sustained socialization of schooling because they represent potentially harmful generalizations that are still rooted in notions of deficit thinking, especially around race/ethnicity, and linguistic diversity. It recalls to mind a passage from my 2016 paper, which frames categorization as a disease:

> This disease distorts our thinking when we uncritically apply terms like success, failure, achievement, and even culture itself. The sickness preys on the very power of the human mind to generalize trends among vast quantities of data, to distinguish order from the noise, to make sense of the world, and to guide our actions (Cimpian & Salomon, 2014). In short, "we must categorize in order to cope" (Lawrence, 1987, p. 337). However, if our sense-making mechanism, our capacity for generalization is racially biased, then no amount of looking at individual decisions, no amount of listening to individual voices, and no amount of reflecting upon seemingly isolated incidents will reveal the true pattern of the disease. (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 4)

Despite all of the differences of historical opinion and cultural perspective, in this section we begin to see Bob's perceptions align with Hispanic board members and classmates, including in the application of lay theories of child development to interpreting student achievement outcomes. Here Bob is actually describing my sons' advantages:

> Well, they're going to have, from you and Momma both, some of the best guidance and encouragement that any parents could ever give their children. Unfortunately, a lot of our children don't have that. Your children have a tremendous advantage right there. And

that alone, if nothing else, which is extremely important to me, but it's unfortunate that a lot of these kids these days they don't have that. They don't have that type of family structure. And I wish they did. I wish it were better for them.

Perhaps this could be interpreted differently, as it is not clear what exactly Bob means by "that type of family structure," yet Iris' account sounds strikingly similar:

Iris: I think that basically home environment, parental environment has to do a lot with the child. . . . But 50% maybe is the school, the 50% is the family, 50% is the community.

Rey: [Your mother] was your very first teacher, that if she even taught you a little bit, that was your very first teacher. And once that little, small grain of salt falls in your brain, you're going to learn something. And if you learn something, it's going to go and go and go, and was just that first little small thing that your mother taught you, that's going to make it.

If your parents were strict, I said you amount to something because one would think, "Wow, my father gave me good advice," and you'd stick to the education. Now, on the contrary, my father was a playboy, so that didn't help any. He wasn't strict at all. Everybody would just wander off. I think that strictness accounted for something back then. . . . You know how kids nowadays, they backtalk. It's true. They're bad seeds. They're worthless, and their parents get tired of them. "Just get out of here."

Generally, Glory has a tendency to describe her character, and her parents influence when reflecting on school, and potential discrimination, racism, and segregation. As she shares:

I was always a teacher's pet. Because of my grades, I guess. And my mom always was very strict with us. So, [if] we didn't behave at school, we not only got a spanking at

school, we got a spanking at home too. . . . I come from a large family. We were 11 in my family. But my mom, she came from Mexico. . . . Education to her was very important. And she comes from a family of educators in Mexico, too. One of my uncles got the Presidential Award in education. So, education has always been very, very much in our family. I have educators and I have a sister that's Assistant Principal in [nearby city]. And my brother in [nearby city].

This description of parents' harsh consequences at home was not isolated to Glory, however, and was echoed by Iris:

I myself was very naïve. I did what my (Anglo) teachers told me to do. And to me it didn't feel like it was something wrong. Of course, there was other students who did think that. But in my case, my parents [would] say this: "If you get a spanking at school, it has to be for a reason. And you're going to get another one at home." So I tried to stay out of trouble. I tried to kind of, like I say, I'm a very patient person, since I was very young. And so, if I was told something I would do it. I mean they would give you an assignment, you would do it. Because that's what you were taught to do. You were raised to obey.

But I mean, it was so different then. . . . Well, my kids grew up in a strict family too. Because my husband was very strict too. I mean, he came from a family of eight that . . . you come home, you go straight to the table and you do your homework. You need to do all this. And they had chores on Saturdays and Sundays too. But I mean, I guess growing up in a family like that was very different for us. And then my mother-in-law never had any problems with her kids. And she was their mother. But she always had my

husband. For the three youngest, my husband was their father instead of their brother. More of a father figure than their dad. And so to them it was fairly hard when he passed.

But I mean, I don't know. Families are so different now. Families are— you go back to the parents working long hours. Not spending a lot time with the kids. And I mean, I don't blame the parents sometimes, but then sometimes I do.

Lay theories of child development extended into Glory and Iris' roles as teachers. As Glory describes what she said to a group of negative students after she was transferred to another district, as a consequence of her (successful) lawsuit against an abusive superintendent:

"You know what? The students there are not any different from you. But it's their attitude." I said, "Here, they wanna win. For it comes from here (heart). And you guys have already given up before you even play." And they listened. I mean, they sat there, and I gave it to 'em, really hard. You know what? They won. They won that week! And they started winning.

The kids came back, and they appreciated the fact. And they worked hard, and they played hard, and they believed in themselves, and they won. What did it take? It took our going to watch them play, believing in them, and making 'em believe in themselves.

The key to understanding how lay theories reinforce a cycle of socialization is when they justify differences in circumstances and life outcomes. Iris makes this logical leap when she describes a perception that poor people may prefer food stamps to work, and that abuse of social service programs is an entrepreneurial activity:

Iris: You know, it's funny. I really don't know what happened. I think when people decided, "We'd rather have food stamps than work." We have good programs, but sometimes people abuse them.

The acute issue of abuse of programs is a complex one. I recall while serving on the Américo Housing Authority Board that a young woman driving a Mercedes SUV came to the office to apply for public housing, claiming $0 in income. Was it right for the executive director to ask how she was paying for that vehicle? Would he have been negligent if he were to ignore the obvious contrast between apparent wealth and her claim of no income? This is worth exploration in future work, by me or others.

However, the broader perception of people 'not wanting work' inherently rationalizes the circumstances of poverty that pervade modern day APISD. This allows for a cycle of socialization around inequity to persist. It echoes Duncan-Andrade (2009), and his warning not to buy into "hokey hope," which presumes the existence of a "multicultural, middle-class opportunity structure that is inaccessible to the overwhelming majority" of urban (or rural?) youth of color (p. 183).

From this perspective, Quito possesses the most divergent theories of child development, which perhaps cannot be termed 'lay theories' since he holds an advanced degree in educational administration, and while his perceptions do not have citations attached, can find some affinity in academic literature. His major concept is that students must learn "to play the game" but also be made explicitly aware this is happening, and reminded that their own identity and culture are still paramount, and must be preserved. In framing these two goals as a dichotomy—cultural identity vs. traditional success in the (presumably White supremacist) game—there is implied a tradeoff.

Playing the game may take a toll on cultural identity and self-respect. For Quito, it seems the key is not to let one of the two competing 'wovles' kill off the other. As he describes:

> I think at the heart, kids need to know who they are, and where they are, and where they come from. At the same time, you have to teach kids that much of this is a game, and you have to teach them how to play the game, but always, and this is tough, . . . building in that reflective process. At the heart, always valuing who they are, where they come from, but at the same time, I have to develop these skills and this capacity to deal with these other things, because it'll get me into doors that otherwise I may not have access to.
>
> "Look, this is a game, and I need to teach you how to play this game. But at the same time, let's make sure you know exactly who you are, where you're coming from, and that there is value in what you know and what you bring to the classroom."

It is interesting how, even given Quito's awareness of "White supremacy" (p. 75, 2014; Urrieta, 2006), and the consequences of a "Master Narrative" called out in the title of his doctoral dissertation (2014), in this context he uses proxy language. "Much of this is a game," he says, but what is the "this" he speaks of, and what exactly is "the game," as well as the "other things" required to gain access to valuable doors? Armed with my knowledge of his training and academic work, I can see it is (most likely) a White supremacist system of advantage that requires uncovering the hidden curriculum, which is equivalent to the manual for "the game." Perhaps Quito's uncharacteristic structured silence speaks to the difficulty of admitting that we (as critical scholars and educators) inherently permit some level of sustained colonization, even amidst our efforts to contribute to a general diffusion of decolonization. We permit some level of tolerable harm to the very students we love and hope to liberate.

What courage does it take to share this back to students explicitly? I get a sense that in class over time Quito arrives at this level of 'truth' with students, and I hope that I can someday build on early failures with my K-12 classes—struggles and limited glimpses of success—and to emulate Quito's challenges in a higher education context, if I am afforded such an opportunity.

Llano Grande Center as a space for resurgence. While the cycle of socialization seems in full swing, sustained through a local, state, and national *cultural political economy*, and embedded in mindsets that reify potentially harmful *lay theories of child development*, there is some evidence of a counter-current. The Llano Grande Center in APISD has operated structurally as a space of resistance against White supremacy, and a space of resurgence for indigenous axiologies, ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies. "Lauro" is the founder of the Llano Grande Project, which eventually became the Llano Grande Center. Over the course of the ethnography we spoke by phone and met in person, at the storied Echo hotel in Edinburg, Texas. I did not include him formally as a participant/friend in this research, in part because of his significant influence over the existing academic literature relative to APISD, his influence overall in the region and regional university, and his life's work which helps shape the prevailing legacy of Américo-Paredes. I think the relative independence of my research, and the variance between our comparative methods, questions, and content adds credibility to those outcomes we find in common (generalizability), and poses provocative new questions for healthy discussion in those areas where our conclusions differ.

This echoes the simultaneous warning and call to action from Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who speaks of "the danger of a single story" (Adichie, 2009). Lauro and I do not share a "single story" of APISD, the walkout, and the culture and community.

And this is a good thing. Many contemporary critiques of ethnographic research and oral histories lie in essential questions of power and benefit—*Whose voices are privileged? Whose are excluded? Who benefits? Who makes research decisions?*—and are improved by increasing the frequency of indigenous, or native, or insider perspectives, or at least (as in my case) insider/outsider studies rooted in axiologies of relationality and reciprocity. I say this as preface to a section featuring the inclusion of more of Lauro's writing, as we touch directly on the project and then center he created, alongside members of the community, as a space of resurgence in the heart of Américo-Paredes.

Lauro arrived in APISD as a student in the very midst of the 1968 walkout. As he describes in Lauro et al. (2004):

> Fourteen years after Brown v. Board of Education, our father borrowed a 1962 Ford pickup truck and crossed the Rio Grande River with his wife and young children. Papi and Mami rode up front and the boys rode in the back of the half-ton truck, nestled amid the remainder of our worldly possessions. On the last day of 1968, we immigrated into the United States. (p. 514)

After Lauro graduated from APISD, he returned again as a teacher in 1990 to find what he describes as an enduring state of poverty:

> When I left Paredes to attend college in the fall of 1983, the Américo-Paredes school district was the poorest school district in Texas. When I returned to my hometown to teach in 1990, it was still the poorest. The status quo was not good. The school was under-resourced, faculty morale was relatively low, students had low expectations of themselves, and parents remained on the margins of the schooling process.

As an overview of his work under the employment of APISD, Lauro writes, "through the ensuing 13 years, my high school students, community members, and I created a body of work that has distinguished [Américo-Paredes] as an exemplary learning environment" (2003, p. 3). Lauro looks to college attendance data as evidence of an exemplary learning environment, noting "in 1990, 29% of APISD graduating seniors attended four year universities; in 2003, 65% of graduating seniors attend four year universities" (p. 3).

As well, his efforts are remembered most often by a drive to enroll more APISD students in "Ivy League" (or highly-competitive) colleges and universities, with data claiming "In 1990, no [Américo-Paredes] graduates attended Ivy League universities. Between 1993 and 2003, more than 80 students have been accepted in Ivy League schools, 51 Edcouch-Elsa graduates have enrolled" (pp. 3-4). I qualify Lauro's notion of Ivy League schools as "highly-competitive" because the original Ivy League constituted a specific set of eight colleges and universities in the Northeast, however common convention would support the inclusion of traditionally 'great' (White predominant) schools like MIT, Stanford, as well as "Little Ivies" or highly-competitive liberal arts colleges like Bowdoin and Vassar.

To accomplish these outcomes, Lauro describes his theory of change:

> Academic and college preparation would be the lynchpin around which we would base our work. As we did so, we would train principled, highly skilled, conscientious leaders who had a sense of their own history, and an understanding of their community. (p. 171)

This training would become formalized through participation in a series of successful grant programs beginning in 1997:

> [W]e received $375,000, and the Llano Grande Research Project was formally born out of my classroom at [Américo-Paredes] High School as an oral history project, though the founding members clearly understood the broader experiences and stories that brought us to the point of formalizing the work in the name of the Llano Grande. (p. 182)

Total grant funding over a 10-year period ending in 2003 would exceed $2 million, according to Lauro. In time, the broad goals of Llano Grande became distilled into a more discrete set of strategies for "young leadership development," as Lauro shares in his dissertation, these strategies include:

> (1) *developing a safe place* where youths can take risks without being discouraged or humiliated for experimenting with innovative ideas;
>
> (2) *creating positive relationship* between youths and adults for personal growth and sound community development work;
>
> (3) *learning skills* through research and youth and community development initiatives;
>
> (4) *creating opportunities to apply skills; and*,
>
> (5) *celebrating our victories* (Lauro et al., 2002). (p. 208)

Now I will turn the memory (and present state) of Llano Grande over to the research participants/friends whom expressed familiarity with the project and center. As Lauro himself says, and as I embrace "the oral story exists as an even more influential form of discourse, and as a viable dialectic of difference" echoing the work of Saldívar (1990).

Quito describes his evolving experience as an APISD student, beneficiary of the Llano Grande Center, graduate of a highly-selective university (Stanford), then Llano Grande board member, Ph.D. recipient, and now effective colleague to the founder, Lauro. Quito begins:

Llano Grande . . . was officially formed, when I was a freshman in college. . . . So Lauro, you know, was the founder of Llano Grande. Lauro had been teaching in APISD since the early 90's, maybe '92 or something, and he just wanted to raise expectations. As a junior, that was the first year that I had Lauro.

One of the earliest conversations we had with Lauro was, he asked, "Where do you want to go to college?" I think I was one of the few that wanted to leave. I think myself and a friend, we wanted to go to Notre Dame, but everybody else wanted to go to UT and A&M. He said, "Well, why don't you all dream bigger?" I think in my class in particular, we were up to the challenge. We said, "Okay, sure, we can do that." . . .

There wasn't an application process. . . . Lauro got to know all of us; he did a really good job of knowing his students. He also wanted to know our story, so he didn't take the top 10 (class rank). He would take kids that he thought would test well, so he . . . brought in a Princeton Review guy the summer before my junior year. He enrolled 15 of us. He got the school to pay for it.

It was an intense six-week summer program that we did. Based on how we did on our scores and then our own aspirations, but also would we leave? He would learn about our parents and talk to our parents. There were kids in the top 10 that never went on the trip because Lauro knew they wouldn't [leave], even if they went on the trip. . . .

My freshman year in college, Lauro had organized some APISD meeting at Yale. I flew in from the west coast. I flew in to Yale and we went and we met at this cultural center and there were so many people from Américo. I thought, "Holy shit, this is really impressive." It was something. I think it was exciting because we were having

conversations [about] how do we build on this and what does that look like? The unfortunate thing is, I don't think we ever did. I don't know what happened. That was '98, that was the spring of '98. We continued to send kids (to the East coast) at least consistently through 2003, I think.

The district didn't sustain it. Lauro left, somebody stepped in, and Lauro tried to mentor them, but the person who stepped in, C—, was a TFA'er and C— was great. C— continued the program, but [he] didn't build the kinds of relationships with parents that Lauro did. Lauro invested an incredible amount of time building those relationships. I think . . . there was opportunity that was lost.

I was in college at the time, but every time I was home, I would work for the (Llano Grande) center. The center was in the high school, in room A-1. We'd bring teachers in and we'd tell them, "This is the Llano Grande Center. This is what we do and this is what we want to do, and it's this great thing," And teachers would get all excited, and then they wouldn't come back.

So originally in '97, Lauro applied for an Annenberg Rural Challenge Grant and he called it the Llano Grande Center, or actually, it was the Llano Grande Project, and it was based on a land grant, the Llano Grande land grant, which encompassed, I think, north of APISD, all the way down to the river (Rio Grande). It was an oral history project. For a year, that's what it started out as. Just this really strong oral history project. Those enrolled in the class would go out and conduct oral histories of the community and then publish a journal with those stories. . . .

Interestingly, several of the older board members I interviewed took some measure of credit for the creation of the Llano Grande Center / Project. As JFK once said, "Victory has a thousand fathers" (and defeat is an orphan). Here's Glory's Llano Grande story:

> Glory: My husband started that. It was our idea. We need to expose these kids to other schools. I mean it's great that we got Pan American (now UTRGV) here. . . . Let's do something more. . . . And our kids need the exposure, we [can] show that our kids can excel. So we said . . . "I have just the right person." I was there when they were discussing this. And he did choose the right person. Lauro was one of the teachers there, and he put him in charge of this what do they call it? The Llano Grande [project]. . . . And how many . . . of our kids were able to go to Brown, to go to Harvard, to go to Princeton, you know.

Regardless of the origins and creation story of Llano Grande, Quito insists the key ingredient to sustaining the space for resurgence was developing enduring relationships:

> Every time I'd come home, I'd reconnect with Lauro. . . . You know, Lauro did a good job of— he'd check in on us, email us. Lauro was very deliberate about keeping everybody in the loop, and many of us wanted to stay in the loop, and some of us just disconnected and moved on. . . . I think when Lauro left, the district underestimated Lauro's value and believed that you could plug anybody in. What I think Lauro identified was that it was really, at the heart of the success, was relationships.

These relationships extended to external friendships with admissions officers of the very set of Ivy League schools that Lauro endeavored to help APISD students secure admission to. As Quito elaborates:

Lauro had very good relationships with admissions officers at all of these colleges and I remember, I didn't understand the power until one night I got a call, my senior year. It was in the midst of sort of hearing back from colleges. Lauro calls me and says:

Lauro: Hey, did you apply to Brown?

Quito: No.

Lauro: Did you wanna go to Brown?

Quito: Well, I don't know. Why, Lauro?

Lauro: Well, because I've got Mercedes here on the phone and if you want in ...

Quito: Wait, what?

Lauro: Yeah. Did you wanna?

Quito: No, I don't think so, Lauro. That's why I didn't apply.

Lauro: Okay. I'm just double checking.

Quito: And I thought, "Holy shit." That was mind boggling to me, to know that Lauro had those kinds of relationships with these people. We'd come in and they'd throw out the red carpet for us and it was awesome. But, I think at the heart of that, . . . what people had underestimated was the amount of time Lauro did to build [relationships]. Lauro knew our parents. Lauro would make it a point to get to know our parents and got to know us on just a different level. He would organize barbecues at his house and so the class would go over there. Or just random field trips out of the blue.

I remember we went to Mexico one afternoon. He invited the class and he said, "Okay, we can't go during class time but after school, meet in the parking lot. If you wanna go, we're gonna drive into Rio Bravo to go look at these giant statues." It was like

a history of Mexico in these statues, these stations. It was on some ranch and he said, "Yeah, my father knows this man and he's got ... Let's all go." So we went in three cars and drove across the bridge. But, that was Lauro. Always thinking out of the box. . . . He was always open to anything, whatever we could come up with.

My senior year, Lauro left the district. . . . He was no longer employed by the district but he would come in. He would come in every Wednesday, and those of us that had gone on the (East Coast) trip, he'd pull us out of class. We'd work on applications with him in the cafeteria, and we'd talk about strategy and we would talk about *packaging*, and how each of us was gonna be *packaged* to the universities.

We got in. I got into everywhere except two schools, and I think the only reason I didn't get in (to these schools) was because I hand wrote the applications, like I just didn't put effort into them, versus typing. I think that's the only reason I didn't get in. I think we all got in to wherever we wanted to go. We all got in.

It's funny that [Superintendent] S— says that about us sending the most kids. (The 2006 teacher orientation featured a claim by S— that APISD sends "more students to the Ivy Leagues than any school district in America.") Yeah, that's a bold-faced lie. I remember in '98, '99, there was an article published— I don't know if it was Parade magazine. . . . And it was a story about Brown, it was about APISD. The story goes that there was a college tour and a woman asked, "What does my son have to do to get into Brown?" The tour guide said, "They should go to APISD." At that point, nobody from APISD had ever been denied admission to Brown.

[Lauro] left again in 2002. And in 2002, that's when I think he finished his dissertation. And so he left to UTPA (now, UTRGV). And actually, Lauro and I started UTPA at the same semester. So we shared an office together. It was kind of funny. . . .

Chris: Initially my involvement in Llano Grande, me going through the Llano Grande system as a student, [and it] was really not-for-profit, helping students get into Ivy League schools. I wasn't going to go to an Ivy League school, I knew that. But what I liked about Llano Grande is the videotaping, the movies that they were making, and that project that they got funded through a grant. Doing these oral histories, these videotaping, getting students off the street, getting them active, you know. We're over there at J—'s house laying outside, then hey, they put a camera in your hand, you're like, "Whoa, you're recording this stuff." It predates Jackass.

I hope to see it succeed. I don't have the time to run it and besides, I have family. I need someone that's going to be able to pay the bills and provide for my family. It's like, you have to have somebody that's young, that's probably the first job that they had, that's motivated and that likes helping the community.

In a similar way, Glory and I discussed the the strengths and weaknesses of the original Llano Grande program, and what a present-day iteration would attempt to accomplish:

Michael: Well even then, like, if we only celebrate our top ten, that's great. But what about the other 99%?

Glory: That was [my husband's] question, always. "Okay Lauro, so you're doing this for our top students, whatever. What are you doing for the ones that really need the help? That was his big thing. If it's a vocational program, then get something that, you know,

> they can be welders right now. Get the program for them. . . . I think they should do it side-by-side, because even sending kids off to college, and teaching them lessons, it's all up here (points to her head), and it's all in the computer, it's also not necessarily healthy for everyone.

Resolving the riddle: Ignorance, corruption, or cultural conflict? In the introduction to this study, I shared the conclusions of a review of APISD by state investigators. Here I return to this case study, armed with oral histories, *testimonios*, ethnographic artifacts, and several years of reflection and discussion. As with every other part of this research, I may produce more questions than answers, but I believe we can add insight to help resolve the riddle of what was "wrong" with APISD. To be direct, it is not simply ignorance of 'proper' (culturally White) board member policy. The answer to the challenges APISD faces lies somewhere between corruption and cultural conflict, depending on who you ask. Those who decry the prevailing system as "corrupt" are precisely those who cannot accept a place within the contemporary power hierarchy; they inherently reject (or at least disdain) the *politiquera* system.

Contrary to the 2006 report, the board members were not "overstaffing" manual trades due to a "lack of knowledge" of industry standards, but to ensure their own political power in a community with a highly organized cultural political economy. In APISD, a key component of school board leadership lies in the ability of trustees to operate within a conceptual continuum that ranges from the visible, or publicly-documented, to the invisible, or extra-legal institutional knowledge (Doherty, 2006). For example, campaign finance reports which are publicly filed with the secretary of the school district—the extent of public disclosure required by state law—are visible instruments that do not capture the full range of informal cash and in-kind (e.g. labor,

materials) contributions by dark money sources to *politiqueras*. Those *politiqueras* then leverage family networks whose voting strength often exceeds 100 participants to carry elections. It would be hasty to label such invisible structures "illegal" for a lack of state oversight and enforcement, coupled with a consistent internal cultural coherence means this is just "the way things are done" for local participants. Thus, as a culturally constituted structure, these systems, which are invisible to outsiders, transitory residents, or even long-established residents (who claim not to know), represent essential operational realities for anyone seeking election to the school board.

The fact that manual trades, the predominant position subject to overstaffing, typically do not require college degrees or specific certifications, means they are easily commoditized into political rewards. Additionally, there are interesting power dynamics that defy common (White) assumptions. A janitor, for example, may wield more political power than a campus principal, if they are more integral to the success of the board slate in future elections, in part via the strength of their *familia*, and the specific *politiquera/s* they are loyal to.

The dichotomy that exists between what state officials call "corruption" or "nepotism" and what is locally invoked as *familia*, dynamic social networks linking multiple families over one or more electoral cycles, backed by dark money, challenges established notions of ethics. It may appear at this point that our mystery is solved. What state investigators initially perceived to be a "lack of knowledge" is instead revealed by the research participants/friends to be a sophisticated system of political power rooted in culture, money, and family networks. However, the negative consequences of this system are disproportionately distributed to both those who align with the losing side of an election, which can cost them the commodified

positions previously earned through politics, as well as those who attempt to avoid participation in politics at all.

These newly marginalized groups do not break evenly along demographic lines, and tragically gender (i.e. women), class, and even immigrant divides emerge within a seemingly 99.6 percent homogenous population. Even skin color, either *morena/o* (dark) or *guera/o* (light) is referenced frequently by members of the community, and threatens to perpetuate within a historically marginalized group a familiar Manichean divide (Fanon, 1967). However, these themes of difference within presumed homogeneity have only been preliminary identified, and subsequent conversations with various board members and classmates in future research on these topics should help create a strong confirmation and/or complication of these issues.

Hope for the future. Iris' response to the question of whether APISD provided the best educational experience was mixed, saying they do "the best we can do. I mean I'm not saying it's the best. It's not the worst. You've been here long enough to see how many people graduate and go to colleges, and recognized colleges." The last comment may refer to the memory/legacy of Llano Grande.

> Bob: I'm afraid right now, with the majority structure that was elected this last election, last November, I'm afraid we're gonna go back the wrong way again. Whereas we'd spent several years making progress.
>
> I don't see it changing. I do not. I think it's too late for that. I think what we see is what we got, and what we're going to continue to get. There will be times when certain factions that appear in some ways at least to be better than the other factions, will surface and win. Then there's other times it will go back the other way. That's what I see. I think

there's always going to be this infighting if you will, where they just don't all see eye to eye and concentrate their efforts on producing the best result.

Bob: (his only question directed at me) Mike, . . . there have been several attempts at, on the national [level] at least, campaign finance reform. Do you think that would be a good thing if we could ever come up with an equitable method of putting some limits on the spending?

Michael: Yeah. I think so.

Bob: It could be.

It's not necessarily . . . the free system that our democracy is based on. The most qualified or the candidate that the majority of the people prefer. Majority is supposed to rule. Okay, but how they rule sometimes is questionable.

In part because his service occurred in just the past few years, Quito connected his experiences and 'lessons learned' directly to the question of what it will take to change cultural patterns and ensure hope for the current and future students of APISD, including my own sons. Our dialogue:

Michael: Thinking about kids for a second, do you feel like you know enough about students and what's happening, from 2012 to present? I guess that's the first question. Do you feel like you really know enough about what's going on with students?

Quito: I think I know more. . . . I don't think I know everything, but I think I know more. . . . I try to listen to my wife and ask her. . . . I've got nieces in the schools too, and so I pay attention to them, and what they're going through. What are some of the challenges, but also what kinds of opportunities are our kids missing out on? For

example, I interview kids for Stanford. We have alumni interviews. That's part of the admissions process, and so I'm often comparing our [APISD] kids against all these other kids that I'm meeting. To be quite frank, we can't compete. We're not providing the kinds of enrichment opportunities that other districts are providing. We need to do better. We need to do better.

Michael: Yeah, it does make me wonder, how do you compete? It's a big question.

Quito: I think you have to be hopefully [culturally] sensitive to the issues in the community. I think at the heart, kids need to know who they are, and where they are, and where they come from. At the same time, you have to teach kids that much of this is a game, and you have to teach them how to play the game, but always, and this is tough, . . . building in that reflective process. At the heart, always valuing who they are, where they come from, but at the same time, I have to develop these skills and this capacity to deal with these other things, because it'll get me into doors that otherwise I may not have access to.

How we do that is challenging because I don't think we've figured that out. I think the state has done a really good job of— I'm reminded of an illusionist. Here's the distraction over here, here's standardized testing. All of these other things are happening in the background that aren't doing anything to enrich our students. How do we acknowledge that this is a distraction, and let's re-shift our focus to all of these other processes that are happening to our kids? . . .

It is going against the current of what everybody else is doing. . . . It is bold. It is brave. . . . We have an early college, and really, I'm against the early college, but when we're losing students at a rate of almost 100 students a year to campuses and to districts that had early colleges— okay, well, the parents want an early college. Okay. Let's provide an early college. How [then] do we provide an early college that's different? Right? That really responds to the needs of the community and the students. We haven't figured that piece out because again, everybody else is going with the current.

"Look, this is a game, and I need to teach you how to play this game. But at the same time, let's make sure you know exactly who you are, where you're coming from, and that there is value in what you know and what you bring to the classroom."

Three of my classes are what's called learning framework. Really, I look at it as teaching them the game, and this is what it means to be a college student, this is what we need to do, these are the hoops we've got to jump through, these are the skills you've got to develop. Then the other class is Intro to Mexican American Studies.

For Bob, hope does not involve a perfect world, but one in which school board members rise above what it takes to win an election, and to leverage the power they hold to do their job well. As Bob explains:

I have had a theory, and I may have mentioned it to you before, I think I probably have, that in politics I really don't care about during the campaign. Call your opponent anything you want to. Lie, cheat, steal, I don't care, it doesn't make any difference. Once the election is over, and the majority of the people have spoken, then forget about all that bullshit, and sit down and start doing the job you were elected to do. That's my theory.

[In] a perfect world, I think it would be that way. Now we don't live in a perfect world, I know that.

This colorful pragmatism, however, fails to acknowledge that the deep ties between *politiqueras*, voters they corral, candidates, dark-money donors, affiliated business interests, 'community service' organizations, and the kinship networks interwoven throughout, do not disappear after the ballots are cast and counted. Rather, as members of the APISD community say to new arrivals, and as they remind one another frequently: *¡Somos familia!* And whenever someone in your family is in need, the common response is, "family comes first."

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This is less a full chapter and more a brief afterward, that preserves the notion of the researcher stamping their work with an uninterrupted narrative analysis. This section was requested by my committee after my dissertation defense. I do, however, see an opportunity to create a conversational set of takeaways that summarize the findings of the critical ethnography. My hope is, even if you skip to this page to ascertain the value and contents of the dissertation, you see in this brief section enough value to dig back into the broader corpus—latin for 'body'—which is apropos as this dissertation is indeed full-bodied, *though hopefully not corpulent!* As well, I will share some informal policy recommendations, and probable next steps, reflective of a set of ongoing conversations with my committee, and my APISD participants/friends.

Culture Matters

One key takeaway of a critical ethnography is that culture matters. In particular, our 'cultural frame of reference' is directly connected to the notion of a theoretical framework, or in my academic vernacular: Axiology, Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology (*AOEM*). For example, the inability of state evaluators who visited APISD in 2006 to acknowledge that there is more to the APISD story than simply (a) "lacking knowledge," and (b) failing to apply a set of "industry-appropriate" staffing standards, is directly tied to their White supremacist *AOEM*.

The agents of the state are operating (presumably) unconsciously as decentralized agents of oppression on behalf of the system I call Colonization 2.0. They wield power that can bring fresh harm to non-White and indigenous communities, which in the case of APISD is ironic and counter-intuitive since they have long since seen White/Anglo residents depart. Regardless of

their findings, or their individual, phenotypic race/ethnicity if they are non-White, state evaluators remind RGV and APISD community leaders that predominantly White conservative legislators are really in charge. In conversation, I often refer to this structure as a *tower of oppression*, with state legislators enacting policy—often absent deep knowledge or investment in educational processes—that dilutes the autonomy of board members, and superintendents. These titular heads of the district likewise impose authority 'downward' that diminishes the power of a principal, who in turn imposes severe restrictions, enforced through fear of sanctions and "loss of licenses," on teachers. Students, sadly, struggle to overcome from the very bottom position of this oppressive hierarchy.

However, the actual evaluators, individuals operating as an enforcement arm for a contemporary colonial system, will most likely reject my characterization of their work as an extreme misrepresentation. Indeed, the subtlety of their individual effects on APISD, and the commonplace acceptance of their bureaucratic work, makes their colonization seem normal, and makes my characterization of their 'normal' *as colonization*, appear truly surprising and likely off-putting. Interestingly, I now recall having an excited conversation with my doctoral cohort one night, as I contemplated the probability that we could be qualified to contract with the state of Texas to perform this very work. Of course, the assumption was we would operate with greater respect for each community and culture, but it begs the question of whether it is possible at all to appropriate these 'masters' tools' (Lorde, 1984, p. 110) in a way that rejects/resists Colonization 2.0? As is, state evaluators' inflexible approach to school district and community culture, rooted in an inflexible *AOEM*, blinds them to a deeper truth.

Likewise, as I discuss with participants/friends—who lament the low probability for positive change in the near future—the inflexible nature of 'the system' is precisely because it is a cultural system. At several points "the game," as the *politiquera* system is sometimes described, is compared to football (*norteamericano*), an equally impassioned "blood sport" within APISD, the RGV, and throughout Texas (e.g. "Friday Night Lights" by Bissenger, 2000), and America. Unlike individual acts of corruption in politics, the *politiquera* system has a deeply rooted fan base, and equally deep benches on rival teams, or *slates*, and corresponding community organizations, or *clubs* that back them through manpower and financial support. If the majority (or a strong minority) of the participants in the culture believe they are beneficiaries of the status quo system, they will likely see little desire for change, and may not even acknowledge that there is a pervasive problem. As well, many people do not enjoy identifying problems for which there is no clear solution. This may only serve to amplify angst without a likelihood of relief.

So to summarize, an analysis of contemporary culture provides deeper insight for those who can operate with a more open and empathetic *AOEM*, but the deep roots and broad adoption of entrenched cultural habits also makes the negative effects of the *politiquera* system hard to fix. To be fair, were it not for the related harms visited upon students in the educational context, I would not even claim that the *politiquera* system is inherently bad, or inherently needing to be fixed. In a way, the *politiquera* system represents the appropriation, ownership, and evolution of civic power structures by a non-White community. However, as we discovered, the benefits of that power are not distributed uniformly within the Hispanic (Mexican American) community of

APISD. And this contemporary inequity extends to our youth, my children included, who suffer from exposure to the toxic stress of poverty.

It is important to note, however, that the millennia-long campaign to destroy indigenous (Mesoamerican) community values, worldviews, and social structures, may make it extremely difficult for the APISD community and leaders to forge an equitable system from the White tools (and White *AOEM*) left behind by White masters (Lorde, 1984, p. 110). In other words, the pathway back to an indigenous AOEM has long since been burned and salted by White colonizers. These decisions were explicitly articulated and written as direct orders in antiquity, spoken openly before 1968, but over time have become hidden and obscured by coded language.

At the risk of inviting wrath for repetition, I want to reinforce the message of Fanon. Colonization 2.0 embraces an evolutionary approach consistent with Fanon's discussion of how "political, social, and economic institutions" (1963, p. 55) including educational systems, continually benefit the colonizer while subjugating the colonized. Key to perpetuating these institutions is "colonization of the mind" (Fanon, 1963). This form of *inception* (Legendary Pictures, 2010) ensures the colonized become colonizers (Villenas, 1996), adopting with minimal interrogation the values, worldview, ways of knowing, and methodologies of their oppressors.

These are very difficult topics to put forward for conversation with an APISD community that only gradually permits my inclusion as a member, ever the outsider/insider. However, for my participants/friends, who asked me explicitly at times for my own suggestions for the future, I will carry the torch, and will outline some possible policy recommendations in the concluding section of this chapter.

Past and Present, *Patrón* and *Politiquera*

There are two powerful stories that are represented in the narratives of my participants/friends. The first—which we categorize as the era of the *patrón*—is still underrepresented both in academic research but most prominently in the curriculum of APISD, RGV, and American schools. This is the story of explicit racism, and historical segregation that intersects the schooling experience. It includes the explicit abuse and trauma—Anzaldúa's *linguistic terrorism*—including swats with a paddle for letting slip an utterance in the native tongue, Spanish. Lauro and other homegrown academics have built careers on sharing these narratives, and facilitated the legitimacy of these stories as foundations for academic knowledge.

To this extent I owe a deep debt of gratitude. In general, there is strong academic evidence of the narratives relating to the APISD student walkout, and the post-1968 community organizing. However, our youth do not know these stories by and large. What brief impressions are shared are limited to passing references to "the fields" (migrant and local farm work) and "swatting hands with rulers" which may not provide the insight necessary to make students aware of the deep trauma inherited from prior generations. I address this gap in knowledge production and delivery via hidden schooling curricula in the policy recommendations section.

More importantly, the second story, of the present-day perpetuation of social and educational inequity, as it exists in APISD and the RGV, and especially with regard to the development of the *politiquera* system, is almost entirely absent from any academic or formal written record. Because "this is water" (Wallace, 2009) that members of the APISD (and RGV) community swim in daily—their *habitus*—they do not often describe it explicitly, or even elevate it to the level of a system. It is simply "the way things are." For this reason, it is

essential to take the seeds planted in this work and to issue a call for (more) members of the local, and broader community, the Hispanic, non-White, and Indigenous diaspora in education especially, to continue going more and more deeply into the work of building narratives and dialogue.

Interestingly, it seems that the authors who invested their academic currency in pursuing the first story (historical racism at the hands of Whites), may have unintentionally created a two-dimensional story in which there are villains (Whites/Anglos) and heroes (Hispanic leaders). To some extent, for 1968, this is true. However, in the words of one local leader (from East Town), "We took power from the Anglos, but we kept it for ourselves" (personal communication). It is impossible for these groundbreaking scholars to tell the second story, of modern-day inequity, without complicating the original narrative, and to some extent tarnishing the reputation of the heroes of 1968. Indeed, throughout my work, I took pains to acknowledge the value and power of both stories, operating collectively to describe the historical and present-day harms for students. In the next section, I give my most earnest policy recommendations, which exposes me to some vulnerability. But my community, my participants/friends would expect nothing less.

Policy Recommendations

My most important recommendation is not to assume that any member of the political leadership class within APISD and the RGV has total agency and autonomy. This means for politicians I recommend that they discuss, not simply their power and opportunity to implement change, but also their limitations, and the way in which their power is infringed upon by (predominantly) White state legislators, and other outside agents of a state and broader power apparatus that I describe as proponents of Colonization 2.0.

To accomplish this task, we need to create pathways for dialogue and spaces of discussion that are non-threatening, where elected officials and other leaders can lay down the 'mask' they may feel pressure to assume at most times during their service. This research, and similar efforts that may follow, are potential examples of such 'safe spaces.' At the same time, these leaders must be held accountable to the broader community, whom suffers the consequences of Colonization 2.0 in greater proportion, and with less access to remedies.

Once we can name the elements within APISD that disenfranchise, and acknowledge the limits to power of even elected leaders, we must then assign action steps to contest and overcome those power inequities. *How can we say "No" to oppressive (predominantly White) state actors where it is essential to the proper education of our youth, while minimizing immediate risk and harm to those youth (blowback) and the community?* We can start by taking the dialogue to the spaces of power directly, leveraging APISD and RGV state representatives and other policy actors (e.g. State Board of Education) as part of a broader community of resistance. To some extent I know this is being done in the current push for a legitimate, state-supported Mexican American studies curriculum. Until the representative leaders of APISD and RGV can operate with a fuller sense of agency and autonomy, however, elections will amount to contests for local control of a dwindling set of assets.

In terms of the *politiquera* system, it is necessary to also follow the practice of naming, exposing, and introducing open dialogue on the pros and cons, the benefits and harms of this structure. One potential benefit is that it represents a complete assumption of power of the election apparatus, often in defiance of the same predominantly White power structure that I call out elsewhere in this text. I have to admit that part of what initially seems 'so wrong' with the

details of the *politiquera* system, is just how odd and different it is from the White American political process, even inclusive of White corruption according to a political hidden curriculum. In other words, the way Whites buy and steal votes even seem notably distinct from the way the *politiquera* system hijacks the voting process; *even the way they take bribes!*

I don't propose to create artificial binaries that label a complex and sophisticated cultural political system 'bad' or either to blithely accept it as "the way things are," but to encourage dialogue so that whatever systems the culture supports and sustains are done so consciously, because power is least diffuse and democratic when it is kept cloaked in unspoken secrecy.

Lastly, my recommendation is to take these complex circumstances, the many questions layered throughout this text, and especially the indigenous knowledge that has been stripped out of 'textbooks' or so-called instruments of learning, and embed most of the elements of this dissertation and critical ethnography into the curricula of our schools. In particular, students should be exposed to critical texts (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Loewen, 1996; Zinn, 2005), but more importantly culturally-relevant texts for Hispanics (Mexican Americans) in APISD and the RGV. Some examples include: Acuña (1988), Dunbar-Ortiz (2014), Montejano (1987), Richardson (1999), and San Miguel (1988). Additionally, within this dissertation are several disruptive discoveries, including (a) that the *khipukamayuq* of the Inka encoded knowledge in binary devices a century before the credited (White, Western) 'inventor' Leibniz; (b) that Mesoamerican cultivators of *maíz* utilized genetic cross-pollination 9,000 years before the credited (White, Western) 'inventor' Gregor Mendel, and; (c) that "Camelot" continues to prove a mirage, with great doubt cast on the authenticity of John F. Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize, and his role as the 'author' of his celebrated (White, Western, exclusionary) text *Profiles in Courage*. I

hope to make it easier for educators to introduce this well-cited knowledge as counter narrative, and to prompt discussions about 'invention' and individual 'intellectual property ownership' (*White, Western AOEM*) versus *memes/mimetic* discovery as the evolution of ideas across and between diverse communities.

One mistake we make as a broader educational community is to introduce elements to students' curriculum only when we reach broad consensus, which means we are less likely to introduce the open-ended questions that will actually define the future of APISD as a culture and community, and the future of America as but one nation within our world. We should go farther, and endow all students with the ability to pursue unique avenues of knowledge creation, to arm them with the auto-ethnographic tools identified in *Figure 9* in the methodology section.

In fact, on this the very last day of editing my dissertation, I have been contacted by a teacher whose high school students are interested in conducting oral histories of participants in the 1968 APISD walkout. Of course, I immediately found time to be a resource, and a facilitator of relationships. Anyone who says that our students are not ready for this work has already failed them. Additionally, I am talking with my committee chair and participants/friends about connecting various networks of change-agents, including teachers, and actively working to ensure our communities feel emboldened to take action to govern our students' learning context. I hope you the reader, will seek ways to join, contribute to, or share this work. Because where I fall short or fail to reconcile my White, erudite, male, middle class privilege with my adoptive *AOEM* (e.g. biodiversity inclusive of culture), I dearly hope to see others lift and carry the torch in this inter-generational struggle to overcome a millennia-long colonization experiment.

My dream is for each teacher and every (lifelong) learner to be empowered to choose their life path, and to align that path to their distinct cultural community, a path that authentically represents their values, worldview, and epistemology. Anything less is an excuse to perpetuate the inequalities of the past; a dream again deferred (Hughes, 1963).

Appendix

Research Proposal

1. Title
   Somos Familia: A Social Network Analysis of a South Texas School Board

2. Principal Investigator
   Michael C. Barnes [mcb3388], Doctoral Student, Department of Educational Administration
   Dr. Angela Valenzuela, Project Sponsor

3. Purpose

   In Paredes (pseudonym) Independent School District (ISD) in South Texas' Rio Grande Valley (RGV), there is a prevailing sense of unity and pride, represented by a popular phrase: *Somos familia!* While many organizations seek to cultivate a sense of "family" to strengthen organizational cohesion, in Paredes this is derived from a common set of longstanding cultural experiences. Most members of the educational community—from teachers, to administrators, to school board members—attended the district as students, at times representing families with multiple generations of participation. This form of participation is expressed by a common refrain that establishes a credential: Once a Parakeet (pseudonym for Paredes' mascot), always a Parakeet. For older generations, shared experiences include being subjected to punishment from Anglo (White) teachers, who swatted students' hands with rulers when they spoke Spanish, and were emboldened by Anglo school board members. This system was symbolically challenged during a nationally-noted walkout in the 1960s. Subsequent White flight dramatically reduced the population of Paredes' two neighboring cities. With a population shift came an adjustment to power that saw the rise and perennial prominence of a Hispanic (Mexican-American) school board.

   However, despite the shift in power, and the presumptive elimination of cultural incongruence due to an increasingly ethnically-homogenous population, performance outcomes for students have continued to lag behind more affluent, White peers statewide. In this regard, the situation in Paredes ISD mirrors much of the broader RGV. In future research, I hope to examine how the discourse surrounding students might socialize them into failing outcomes, specifically for Paredes' middle school children. However, it seemed difficult to account for factors influencing student outcomes without first acknowledging the significant presence of Paredes' board of trustees, which was determined in a 2006 state review to have overreached "its responsibility by interfering with the daily operations of the district" (source withheld to protect anonymity).

   While teachers and school administrators, including the district superintendent, clearly play significant roles in student achievement outcomes, the role of the school board has been historically under-examined (Land, 2002). Part of this may be due to the difference between "visible" and "invisible" (Doherty, 2006) relationships between student achievement outcomes. While a teachers' and administrators' daily actions are visible activities that directly influence students, school board members' actions overall, and especially as relates to student achievement are typically more invisible. The application of social network analysis may assist in giving form and structure to invisible power relations (Doherty, 2006) and may "improve the quality of leadership in our educational organizations" (Deal, Purinton, & Waetjen, 2008, p. 2).

4. Procedures

In this research, I undertake a series of interviews with current and former Hispanic members of the Paredes ISD School Board and their former classmates to construct a critical ethnography.

For this study I focus on a single Local Education Agency (LEA) or Independent School District (ISD) in South Texas' Rio Grande Valley (RGV). To help protect the identity of participants, I establish the pseudonym Paredes ISD. Additionally, all school board members and classmates will be referred to by a distinctive set of randomly assigned initials, accompanied by a year designating the first date of board service (e.g. MB-1984), or graduation date or last year of enrollment for former classmates.

I will first construct a record of School Board composition over time, based on a review of historical documents. Then, I will use snowball sampling to identify an initial group of at least 4 School Board members and 2 former classmates, for Board Members whom served between the years 1960 and 2015, each with whom I will complete at least 2 interviews that will last between 45-90 minutes, in a format ranging from conversational to semi-structured. Specifically, School Board members who are repeatedly mentioned across interviews will be prioritized for inclusion. I am prepared to conduct the interviews in English or Spanish, or a combination of the two languages. A general interview protocol has been created to encourage explorations of themes, such as board diversity, motivations for participation, election strategies, cooperation and competition in decision-making, and student achievement outcomes.

Following the initial field research, the recorded interviews will be transcribed and translated (as necessary) into English. I will code the transcripts by hand and identify emerging themes. In addition to transcribed interviews, I will include in my data analysis: field notes, and publicly accessible documents.

A second semi-random approach may be utilized at the conclusion of the initial interviews, as necessary. In this approach, at least 2 School Board members identified through the historical review, but whom have no mentions in the transcripts, may be invited to participate on a random basis in at least 2 interviews each. This is to ensure that the research data is not located entirely within one social network, at the exclusion of other voices.

a. Location

For the sake of feasibility, I will focus on School Board members and former classmates whom are accessible in person, and willing to meet in a mutually-agreeable, preferably familiar setting. The likelihood, therefore, is that participants are either living in the immediate Paredes ISD area, or accessible within the broader RGV, or the area between the RGV and UT-Austin, including the Austin area, where I will be traveling during the time of this study. The entire study will take place in Texas.

b. Resources

All travel and research related expenses are personally funded.

c. Study Timeline
   - The proposed study will begin on October 19, 2015, or upon receipt of IRB approval, if received after October 19.
   - An initial set of interviews will be conducted between October 19-February 15, 2017.
   - The initial interviews will be transcribed, translated into English (as necessary), and analyzed by the PI prior to March 15, 2017.
   - An early analysis was shared with research colleagues at the University Council for Educational Administration conference in San Diego on Sunday, November 22, 2015.
   - Final interviews will be conducted prior to February 15, 2017.
   - Final transcriptions, translations, and analysis will be completed by the PI prior to March 15, 2017.

5. Measures
   The general interview protocol for the interviews was specifically designed to address the purpose of the study. Questions posed revolve around explorations of themes, such as board diversity, motivations for participation, election strategies, cooperation and competition in decision-making, and student achievement outcomes. Specific questions are available in the uploaded interview protocol.

6. Participants
   a. Target Population
      I anticipate a sample size of up to 12 Board Members who have served Paredes ISD between 1960 and 2015 and 12 former classmates for a total of 24 participants (maximum).
   b. Inclusion/Exclusion
      The focus of the project is specific to Board Members who served between 1960 and 2015 and their former classmates.
   c. Benefits
      Participants in the study can expect no extrinsic benefits from participation in this study. However, the inclusion of historically marginalized voices as counter-narratives situated in the academic literature may prove individually empowering, and assist in an inter-generational struggle for educational equity.
   d. Risks
      Board Members and their former classmates involved in the study can expect no risk for their participation.

      No personal data will be collected. Randomized pseudonyms will be applied on an individual basis, as well as identifying data distinguishing Paredes (pseudonym) ISD excluded from transcriptions and analysis.
   e. Recruitment

Board Members that already have a conversational relationship with the PI will be asked to participate in the research. Two such individuals have been consulted in the development of this research proposal, as consistent with a call from indigenous research participants at AERA 2015, to ensure there is "no research about us, without us."

Subsequent participants will be recruited through snowball sampling, with preference given to Board Members and their former classmates who receive frequent mentions across multiple interviews with multiple participants. Semi-random sampling is reserved only in the case that a substantial number of Board Members and their former classmates receive no mentions, to ensure that certain voices are not privileged above others.

f. Obtaining Informed Consent

The Board Members and their former classmates who participate in the interviews will be provided with a copy of the interview protocol, a more generalized description of the intent of the research, along with a description of measures that will be taken to minimize participant risk and safeguard individual identities. I am seeking a Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent with the justification that the research presents no more than minimum risk and procedures would not require consent outside the research context.

A more complete description of the project, including theoretical references, transcriptions, translations, and analyses, will be offered to participants for review and comment before publication of the research. Exclusion of some research details at the outset of the interviews is necessary to ensure that Board Members and their former classmates are not influenced in their commentary by the PI's perspectives and possible outsider bias.

7. Privacy and Confidentiality

The privacy and confidentiality of participants is very important. No identifying details, or contact information, will be collected or kept throughout the research project. When referring to individuals, pseudonyms will be applied; additionally, the anonymity of Paredes (pseudonym) ISD will be preserved.

Confidentiality of the Data or Samples

a. Conversations will be audio recorded, then transcribed, and (as necessary) translated into English.
b. All notes, audio recordings, transcripts, and research files will be kept in password protected files.
c. All data will be kept by the PI only until the end of the research project.
d. Because of the potential historical value of audio recordings of Paredes' Board Members, who are elected officials, audio recordings and transcripts will be turned over to the participants. If the participants prefer, the PI may facilitate introductions with archivists at the UT-RGV or the Museum of South Texas History, for possible preservation.

8. Compensation

No compensation will be given for participation in the study.

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VITA

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This manuscript was typed by the author.